A VIRTUOUS GIRL

MAXWELL BODENHEIM

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By

MAXWELL BODENHEIM

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To

EMMY LOU

A VIRTUOUS GIRL

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FIRST SECTION

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I

THE effulgence and lushness of earliest summer were rampant in Washington Park, Chicago, in the year 1900, and in the afternoon sky gray-barreled clouds raced to break the heat of the sun, while the air lurched somewhere between wind and breeze. The great, annual parade to the American Derby at the Washington Park Race-Track was under way and the park roadway, through which the vehicles rolled, was lined with a buzzing, slapdash, delightedly uncomfortable crowd of people, with their flesh broiling underneath absurdly heavy clothes and their spirits grabbing a little of the summer's nude sapience. They were standing to pay homage to those whom they regarded as their superiors—the society-people and the fast set of Chicago rolling in a sedate, peacock-straight procession to the track where a bunch of select horses, nagged by whip and spur, would leap along a dirt oval and cram artificial suspense into the prearranged lives of the spectators. . . .

Emmy Lou, christened Emily Louise Filkins, was watching the Derby Parade and clutching a bottle of strawberry pop, with all the transported dignity of an Alice-in-Wonderland drinking from a scepter given to her by the jolly summer afternoon. Her sweetheart,

Dick Rosenstein, stood beside her. He had a bottle of lemon pop, with two others tucked into the pockets of his roomy, gray coat, and he held it with a manlike grimness, as though it were a baseball bat and he was gripping it in the alternation which decides the question of first-up in a scrub game between boys. His free left hand was finger-locked with Emmy Lou's and, in the habit of youth, he glowered, or puckered his lips up to the sibilant birth of a whistle that never materialized—devices to hide the ignitions of tumult and languor that sprang from the touch of her little knuckles.

Emmy Lou was seventeen and as slim-slender as the last sigh in a prayer for happiness caught within unhappy forebodings of flesh. She had much of a weakling destined to be beaten down by life while striking back wildly at each onslaught—animal courage hampered by a slight body, a confiding sentimentality, a bare breast disdaining the little armors, the little, prating sureties, of that smugness which rules so much of the earth. Even at seventeen she had a soft, dreamy, sober outlook on life, and a gently tactless way of acting that brought her many reprimands from her elders, and a heart that was not carnal but fearlessly birdlike in the flutterings of a longing for "romantic," space-erasing, sweetly vowing sex. Sex to her was bee-oo-ti-ifu-ul, oh so bee-o-oo-ti-ifu-ul, and warmly spiced, and releasing . . . and dimly, in the chime-laden, palpitantly unequipped depths of her virginal heart, she wondered why people made it, oh, kind of ugly, and choked up, and never mentioned "till something hap-

pened," and, oh . . . words got so small and tired wrestling with this slippery thing, but, sneaky, sneeaky, and always whitewashed over, as if it wouldn't be decent if it stood out in the open and everybody could see it and have it . . . if they wanted to, without fuss or feathers.

Her idea of romance—if she could have shaped it into words—was profoundly simple and held none of the slushiness, the trifling experiment, with which an unimaginative shop-girl, stenographer, flirtatiously half-unties her fears. Romance, to Emmy Lou, was to find something with a light and yet breath-robbing newness that could stand apart from streets, houses, and all of their covered-up, meanly watching people, and become a fulgent, brave, unstained secret—a secret that made these streets, houses, and swathed, prosily prattling people more endurable, more of a background sweetly, oh, so sweetly ignored. Romance to her was to stumble upon something unexpected, teasingly "improper," with an unworldly upward tilt to its real, or figurative, chin—something that she could hug to the smallness of her heart and make it large, conspiringly set apart. Romance to her was a breeze-swift, effacing taunt to all the mite-weighing prose of life, as almost every one she knew seemed to live it—the wordless song that chased away all of the unsinging, chary, overworked words from human tongues, all of the: "Don't forget now—two pounds of sugar, half a pound of bacon with the rind sliced off, and, oh, yes, a dozen eggs." "I can have that dress made over for five dollars, my dear, and think of what I'll sa-ave." "I

thought I'd fa-aint when she said: 'Isn't it wonderful to be so happy after you've been married ten years?', 's though we didn't know that they fight like cats 'n' dogs." "No, you *can't* have fifty cents to go to the ball-game, and please don't whine about it!" "Have you heard the dreadful stories about Alice? She was out in the park until midnight, with that Robey fellow, and her mother gave her a terrible tongue-lashing. I'll bet she'll turn out to be a wild one, just like her sister."

Yes, yes, romance to Emmy Lou was something forbidden, tight-lipped, and scarcely surviving as it dodged through other people's envies and extortions, and on a different planet she might have embraced it in the full glare of noon, turned it to a poem too robust to be quite delicate, too delicate to be quite gross. On the earth she was doomed to hug it beneath railings, sneers, and betrayals, until it became bitter-sweet, hard-surfaced, half benumbed . . . but never entirely dying.

As she watched the parade to the Derby now, she dropped the empty pop-bottle on the grass and said: "It's so ducky and plummy to-day, Dickie. Really it is . . . I'd love to take off my shoes and do a two-step right on the grass, I would."

"Well, if you want to shock everybody silly, go ahead, Emsy, but lord help you if your mother hears about it!"

"Lord help me if she hears me bre-eathe out of turn. Don't I know it though. But mother'll never hold *me* down—I don't care what she says."

He looked at her with a near-bruised, loving pity on his face and he had a premonition that life would thrash her, and slash her, without even knowing it, and all because *she* was a sentimental person cut into steel instead of sugar, and life would get angry breaking its teeth against her—a premonition which his boyishness translated into these words: "Emmy's a soft, dreamy dear, she is, but she won't budge, or take people's sass, and, oh, I guess she'll get into heaps of trouble before she's through."

Then his chest swelled out and he clenched one fist. Not if he could help it! She needed the protection of a man to keep all the dirty hands of the world away from her, and he was going to marry her some day . . . fog . . . bits of clear determination floating dismally in a titanic fog. Marriage was so glitteringly remote and portentous to a nineteen-year-old boy just facing the last semester of his senior year at high school, leagues away from money and a job and that free-tongued incisiveness that springs from varied, realistic experience.

"You know, Emsy, I wish I had one quarter of your spunk"—his face was screwed up to that of an overgrown baby aching to be a man, to be ruminantly strong, to leap over brick walls and slinky "don'ts." "Oh, I'll have it when I go out in the world, you can bet your boots I will, but right now . . . well . . . right now I don't feel able to fight with things. Great, big things, I mean—not just fellows you can punch in the face and stand up to."

Emmy Lou looked warmly at him and a song of the

day floated in through a crevice of her heart, for no reason other than that it brought a meaningless, pink-bubbling security and hid the unfulfilled rappy-tap of heart-beats. "I'm your Annie. You're my Joe. Down the road together. We will go-o."

"You stop talking like that. You're going to be a great man some day, Dickie, and *I'm* just the girl you need to push you along."

"You certainly are, Emsy, old brick"—his face lit up and a huge swirl of high-headed plans was crowded into the light-points of his smile.

They turned their attention to the parade again and locked hands in a striving to make their past words seem real and give them a good-luck pressure of fingers. Emmy Lou was tall for her years and despite the droll-pathetic slimness of her body she exuded a physical maturity that was not dependent on curves, or the engravings of experience—a sarcotic, compressed appearance of premature ripening, which suggested a narrow flower rather than a bud. Some women retain a folded-in, unmarked fleshliness even in their forties and others reach full womanhood as early as sixteen, hastened on by an instinctive, sexual wisdom entirely independent of the hotly invading fantasy which is experience. . . .

Shuffle the photographs of Emmy Lou and deal them out to the various players in her life. The dealer wears a hood, so that one cannot see who he is, but it may be that he is compounded of self-hatred and self-esteem crushed so closely together that only children can sense the dividing-line, and only old people can quiet the

wrestle and change it to an indifferent unit. The dealer is spurred on by a force in the universe which seems impersonally cruel only because it is never quite in step with the personal fears and clutchings of an earth.

Here was the photograph of Emmy Lou handed to Dick Rosenstein—fluffs of blonde hair pinned to a near-cone effect on the top of the head—hair as unearthily yellow-gold as a child's dream of a sunrise. Below the hair a small face rested, a little inclined to be oval and with a whitish-tan skin. A sprite existed once and it grew sad and wrapped itself in a whitish-tan cloud and remained hidden there forever, because it could not be a poet. Emmy Lou's face was spirituelle and yet softly, even boldly, sensual at the same time, and those people, who see any contradiction between these qualities combined within one face, have never discerned the rare children on this earth—the humans whose sexual longings chase an impossible ideal of completeness, of unerring, delicate appropriateness, of challenge and harmony never harsh in the first quality, or cloying in the second. These rare ones often wind up with their longings reduced to soured wraiths and their flesh endlessly, incredibly violated, but they never lose the central essence—a vast longing to wring beauty and unworldly fulfillment from the contentious, disclaimed, skin-game of sex played by droves of fearful people! These rare ones never lose a spirit near to that of a child's determination to spy the color of the wind, regardless of whether they end in the parts of prostitutes, spinsters, bachelors, misinterpreted "libertines." Emmy Lou belonged to this unfrightened,

unmoral but never coarsely lustful band of stragglers, and so the gauntlet of an opposite world was waiting for her—the old array of clubs, stones, turned backs, sightless body-longings, manufactured attempts to reform, or ridicule. . . .

Her eyes were fragile cavities for a blue light of unruffled sincerity, inquiry, and her little, straight nose was supersensitively honest over the soft, earnest bow of impenitent lips, whose corners were jerked down just a bit by dabs of obstinacy. While her chin did not protrude, there was nevertheless an appearance of unobtrusive strength clinging to its little, velvet, flesh-padded angle. She wore a long dress of white, starched chintz, with a broad sash of pale blue ribbon around her waist and trailing down in a bow against her left hip, and high, white shoes, and a straw hat trimmed with pink braid and jutting out six inches around her head. The hat made her face seem even smaller than it was, and shaded a species of dwarfed wistfulness which had exclusive, trusting dreams of largeness in its blue eyes.

Dick Rosenstein was tall and brown-skinned, with curly, chestnut, untrimmed hair that was somehow feminine and masculine without indicating perversion, or weakness—a division that extended to his face, with its brown eyes, slightly curving-out nose, and widely thin, close lips. Only a professional psychologist knows the clear line of demarcation between man and woman and can even place an authoritative finger on the myriads of shadings within this line, but let us

be more humbly uncertain, more attuned to surprise and reversal.

Dick was a man through and through and yet he had strong feminine attributes in thralldom to this manhood—a responsiveness to pain as acutely lyrical as the scraping of violins in an insanely orchestral heart; a love for shy prettinesses and gimcracks—pansies in his lapel, and perfume on his 'kerchiefs, and a tongue-tied shrinking from the questions and harangues of older people—a shrinking that sometimes attained the proportions of closed-in, day-dreaming melancholia. Yet, he could take the fists of other boys without wincing and trade blow for blow with them, and he had tied the interscholastic school-records for sprinting and hurdling, on his track team, and before meeting Emmy Lou he had loved another girl and had experienced the beginning ravages of a valid grief when she turned to an older man favored by her family—that first, pure, unique hurricane of desire, which unimaginative fools call puppy-love but which has all the thwarted, quick-blooming wisdom of centuries of blackguarded hearts behind it! . . . Yes, let us leave final catalogues to psychologists and be humble, inquisitively humble, as we face the morbid, deceptive-laned, nerve-snagged riddles of sex.

On this summer afternoon, Dick was wearing a petunia in his buttonhole and had all of the regalia worn by amateur-coxcombs of his time, without the accompanying posturings, chin-raisings. The padded shoulders of his gray, mohair coat, with its dollar-large, pearl-gray buttons, made him seem to be an excep-

tionally burly man down to the stomach and a bantling underneath it, and he wore an upright, round white collar with a cream-white, diagonally folded cravat and a bulldog, gold stickpin with little, garnet eyes. A huge gray fedora topped his curls, and his trousers were narrowed down to close, high cuffs above blunt-nosed tan shoes.

His heart had a thistledown bobbing to it now, as he looked at Emmy Lou, and he would have given his right hand to turn her shoulders around and kiss her, with ever-rising vehemence, until the parade and all the people standing on the turf became the clatter and blur of another sphere. But the "strictness" of his upbringing—an endless cannonade of upright, alabaster, orthodox words directed against the apparitions of impulse and naturalness—told him that it was vulgar and inconsiderate to embrace a girl in public. He felt that most people wanted to be vulgar and inconsiderate, just as he desperately longed to give Emmy Lou a profusion of kisses before the very eyes of this crowd, but that they showed the sanity, the thorough breeding within their characters, by squelching this worst side of their natures. . . .

Yes, Dick, your imagination writhes a little underneath all of the emptily "erect" interpretations, interdictions, given to you by older people so bent upon creating young parrots for their fears and somnolences. The old, old story, so boresome to bankrupt sophisticates, so unfounded to conservatives, and so heart-mangling to those in the audience who must sometimes weep at the spectacle of youth crushed into the ma-

chine of older people's defeats, crushed to avenge the first trampling experienced by many of these elders themselves!

Dick turned to Emmy Lou and said: "You know, I'm ashamed of myself sometimes, Em'."

" 'Shamed of what?"

"O-Oh, just . . . just ashamed."

"Well, I haven't the least idea what you're driving at. You're so-o funny, Dickie—such a fu-unny one. . . . 'Here we come. Where from? Philadelphia. What's your trade? Lemonade. Give us some.' Now you go ahead and make the signs, Dickie, and I'll try to guess what it is. I haven't played tha-at game since I was fo-ourtee-en."

He was wedged between a desire to laugh at himself and frown at her twitting disrespect.

"Oh, I ca-an't tell you."

"Can too."

"Can't."

"Shamey thing, shamey thing, wo-ouldn't te-ell hi-is mo-othe-er"—she sang the last words provocatively.

"You're *not* my mother but you act like it sometimes —treating me 's if I was a baby, when you're just 's much one yourself."

"Oh, is that it? Well, you're worse than a baby sometimes, Mister Dickie Rosenstein, and that's one of the reasons why I like you. And then again you get horribly grown-up, and you say the dee-epest things. Really, Dickie, I don't know whe-ere to put you."

He growled and shook her shoulder, as he stamped his feet, and she asked: "What's that for?"

"Yee-o-ow! Don't stop me. I'm a bold, hairy Rough Rider and I'm going to carry you up San Juan Hill right in the teeth of the enemy."

"All right, Colonel Roosevelt Richard Rosenstein, but don't wrinkle my dress and *don't* get fussed up if all the people here start to laugh at you."

They grinned at each other—the minstrelly, cleanly wide grin with which a certain species of youth confessed that all of its just-spoken words had been undeceived tomfooleries—and she turned to the parade and then cried: "Oh, Dickie, look at that old lady with the yellow ostrich-plumes and all the pe-earls. I'll bet a cookie that's Mrs. Potter Palmer."

"Mrs. Potted Pa-alms—who cares. We're just as good as she is, even if we haven't got millions of plunks"—he felt squashy at having dared to say the words and yet every inch a democratic, unproven ma-an, who would still remain plain as nails even after he gained his wealth and fame—the forlorn swelling-up of youth, which often feels small and disregarded despite all of its boasts and enthusiasms.

Emmy Lou looked at him with a feeling which would have been motherly, if amusement had not tussled with it on even terms, and she said: "My, but aren't you talking hi-igh to-day. Why, if she was ever to invite you down to her castle on the Boulevard I *know* you'd go running down there lickety-spli-it."

"I would not."

"Would too."

"Oh, have it your way. There isn't *anything* you don't know."

"Now, Di-ick, don't get mad at me, 'cause . . . 'cause" (singing) "te-easing, te-easi-ing, I was only teasing you. Te-easing, te-easi-ing, just to see what you would do, so don't get angry d-arli-ing. . . ."

He reached for her hand again and looked like the little boy who dreamed that he was being spanked and then suddenly woke up to find that his mother was begging him to steal another jar of jam. The clacking of horses' hoofs against the broad roadway of white, crushed stone and the rumble of wheels and the chatter of people filled the air. Broughams, phaetons, victorias, coaches, plebeian buggies, tally-hos, carts, and very occasionally a covered cab, or a hansom, rolled along, drawn by whinnying horses with their heads held high by check-reins, their manes bobbed, and their glossy sides and haunches dappled with sweat. Footmen and drivers in liveries of black boots, white trousers, dark green, swallow-tail coats, and shiny, black plug-hats, stood on the running-boards and sat in the front, or rear, of the vehicles, with their cargoes of fashionable, or fast, men and women.

In their elaborately laced, ruffled, and voluminous clothes, topped by broad picture-hats and silk parasols, the women were self-consciously on exhibition and poised to the point of waxlike staidness, for high-society in those days doted on showing its virtues and dignities as an example for the unruly, saloon-encouraged, alleged commonness of "lower classes," and even the leaders among sporting-men and -women strove to imitate these higher ones, in public demeanor at least, and thus indicate what thoroughbreds they also

could be on occasion. Snobbishness was solidly and even grandly out in the open then, instead of signing cheap "ghost-stories" for cheaper magazines; deigning to stride down the pavements of Fifth Avenue, or Lake Shore Drive; romping in night-clubs with chorines and negroes; and inexpensively orating on good-fellowship, as it often does now.

The men in the parade, frequently heavily mustached, or bearded, wore black, cutaway coats and dark gray trousers and fancy, dove-gray and white vests below their folded stocks, and an assortment of silk stove-pipe and gray and brown derbies, with large air-holes in the latter. The men were less stiffly composed than their women and often kept an eye out for pretty girl-faces in the line-ups along the roadway, but even they were quite consciously raising a fictitious aristocracy with the arching of eyebrows. . . .

Oh, Emmy Lou and Dick Rosenstein, to you this is a pageant of gods and goddesses riding to an élite, barricaded, bonny excitement and forcing you into flip comments to keep your outward ease in spite of the throes of awe within your hearts. Mercifully so, since the credulous, tinfoil, apish glamour brings you a horizon of hope—fastidious, lackeyed, regal emancipation for the unnoticed, uncertain, laughter-shielded graynesses of your lives. The glamour will disappear in after-years. The denizens of an upper world, as remote as they ever were, will change to puffed-up money-snatchers playing at kings and queens to hide the prosy drainings and inroads made upon their hearts and imaginations, or mundane idlers viewed with hate

as they ride past your sidewalk traps, or common people with the same lusts, cankers, and discords prevailing in your world, save for the privacies and sensory recompenses so stingily allotted within your own existences. Yes, make them gods and goddesses for this one day and force the ugly, pointed realities of a whitewashed world to wait a little longer for the particular pair of victims. . . .

The parade shrank down to a trickle of carriages, and Emmy said: "My feet are just like le-ead from standing here."

"Oh, why did we come here and watch those big muckity-mucks anyway? We could have gone over to the meadow and watched a jim-dandy baseball game and had some re-eal fun."

"Oh ye-es? I suppose your eyes weren't popping out all the time, Mister Dickie. O-Oh no-o."

"They were nothing of the kind. I was just interested thinking about how I'd be riding to the Derby like that some day. And I *will* too, don't you fret."

"I know you will, Dicksie Wick, but . . . my-y, how I'd love to be sitting in that race-track right now, how I'd lo-ove it. It must be wonderful to bet, oh, a pi-ile of money, and just shout your head off, and then . . . and then the horse you've bet on, he comes rackety-clack down the stretch and he ju-ust manages to win in the last few strides. My, it would be enough to give me heart-failure!"

"I'd rather have the nag come in last, so's I could show what a good gambler I was and how losing a thousand 'r two was no-othing to me."

"You would, would you? Well, *I* was only fooling. I'd just like to sit there and holler for my favorite pony, even if I hadn't bet a single Indian on him."

"Ye-es, seems like a person misses everything if he hasn't rich folks."

"Oh, I don't know."

"Well *I* do. Here I've got to nag and nag the old man for two bits, two measly bits, and one of my cousins, Mo' Benjamin—you know, the one that goes to Phillips—well, *he's* watching the races this very minute. His dad's partner in that big clothing-shebang on State Street."

Emmy Lou gave him a curious look. Within the look, the veriest beginning of brooding tried its best to shift into optimism without entirely succeeding.

"Now, Dickie sweet, don't always be fussing and complaining 'bout this 'n' tha-at." (a pause) "It'll be so much nicer when we get up in the world all through own own efforts, 'stead of being shoved along and having it all ha-anded to us on a silver platter. You know it will."

"You're right, Emmy—I'm getting to be a regular cry-baby. Let's forget about it"—all the blindfolded, tinselly parlor-tricks of hope were squeezed within his boy-face.

The parade had thinned out to occasional carriages, and bicycles—tandems and singles—were reappearing, darting in and out of mud-spattered buggies and rigs holding the people to whom Derbies represented an ungodly sport, or a lure beyond their pocketbooks. Emmy Lou and Dick strolled up one of the gravel

paths to The Refectory, a two-story building of yellowish-brown brick with a small tower and a slate-topped veranda. Reaching their destination, they sat on stools at the counter and ate strawberry ice-cream sodas, and felt aimlessly, sparklingly melty, and traded the jabbering nonsense of youth—nonsense only because it was unaware of a more efficient self-congratulation known as wisdom—and giggled awestrickenly underneath the magnitude of their love for each other, and . . . were continually pressing hands and arms in every tentative shade of deferred desire because a putridly fearful civilization would not permit them to hug each other openly, thoroughly, in the full, sappy, crudely tossing beauty of daylight.

As they were walking away from The Refectory, they met another couple, Ella Freund and Donald Corbett. Ella was a blown-out minx of eighteen, with thick, black curls grazing her shoulders, and the puffy, sated, veiledly lascivious face of a youngster who had been born dreamlessly old in the cradle, despite the ignorances and fresh lusts which made her young. Donald, with his straight, brown hair and slender tallness, was a popinjay with a rooster's crow forever visualized on his sharp-beaked, plump face—a boy to whom no person on earth was as wonderful as himself, above the snivelly coercions which shoved on the industries of this conceit.

The quartette sauntered over to the low, glass-structured conservatory, around which beds of geraniums, rhododendrons, phlox, jasmines, and gladiolas were laid out in oblongs, circles, and squares, and gave out

the sheered, groomed, suavely, tamely cryptic, slavishly rich essence which attends the disciplining of Nature in any formal garden. The four kept up teasing volleys, which lacked the wisecracking hardness so often on the tongues of rank-and-file youth in our day, for in the year 1900, striplings were more blanketed, scarey, and stalked by the eyes and ears of their elders. Blanketed, yes, but only outwardly, for youth of any kind in any generation has always a minimum of cockiness, lunging, pledge-gilding . . . sprouts of earth refusing to be entirely held down. Donald had a croquette-box and was tired of lugging it, so he was forever begging the others to start a game, while the girls chided him for not caring to view the "prettiness" of the flowers and sniff in their "uppsy-duppsy, just too lovely" odors.

"Oh, come on and pla-ay, Dick. Don't let the girls make a mollycoddle out of you!"

"Smarty-cat—Dick's just as strong as you any day, even if he does like to look at the posies here"—Emmy Lou's face had a pussy's contraction.

"Oh, sure, Samson was a strong hick too till that hussy Delilah went and cut his hair off."

"Looka here, Don'—don't you call Emmy a hussy while I'm around. I won't stand for that."

"Oh, go sit on a ta-ack then—Don' was only joking and *you're* just looking for a chance to be snappy, Dick."

"We-ell, I'm daffy about Emmy and she's my touchy spot."

"Sure, I feel just the same about Ella but I can

tell when a fellow's joshing me and when he isn't. You darn well know I didn't mean it, Dick."

"Well, perhaps I *am* a hussy, but I don't care"—the look on Emmy Lou's face was jocosely close to a hazy defiance which she herself could not have explained.

Dimly, she felt that hussies were underdogs and needed to be defended from the persecution of women who weren't hussies but were just plain mean. Donald and Ella would have been aghast at the terrible thing that she had said—and grudgingly envious of her outspoken nerviness, beneath the first reaction—if they had not felt certain of her jesting motives, and they simply "looked down" at the forward, unladylike flavor of her remark. "Emmy Lou sure was a brassy one with her tongue," but otherwise she wasn't a really bad girl as far as *they* knew. Dick, worried, loyally excusing, and bewitchedly admiring, all in one, inner swirl, broke the short silence and said: "Now Emmy, dear, you mustn't give Don' and Ella a wrong impression of you. You're not a fast girl, sure not, and you never will be either, 'spite of all your fooling."

Emmy Lou planted her little feet far apart, placed the back of one hand on her hips, cocked her head to one side, and held her big, brown satchel by the strap as she twirled it around—actions in imitation of the fallen woman in a play called "Way Down East," which she had attended during the previous week and which had just finished a long run at McVickers Theater in the Loop. Her face had a glower with threats of weeping in it, as she said, in a nasal, singsong voice: "You have cast me into the gutter, Richard Rosen-

stein. It was you who robbed me of my honor and made me the broken-hearted toy of your devilish wiles. It was you who mocked me and scorned me and left me in rags and poverty with my poor, little cheeild. I am a hussy now, yes, a wretched, deegraded hussy, but I shall revenge myself upon you. I shall make you suffer as I have suffered, monster that you are!"

Ella and Donald gave vent to paroxysms of laughter and felt that anything Emmy Lou said, or did, must be tolerated because she so often followed her bold, queer remarks with rib-nudging comedies—a topsy-turvy girl, untrusted and unfathomed, but somehow entertaining and regular in spite of everything. Dick was still uneasy—a feeling which he could not form into words but which told him that she had merely draped a "terribly big" seriousness to escape from defending it. The infectious staginess of her words swept seven-eighths of this feeling from his consciousness, however, and he looked at her with a ruefully respectful grin on his face.

"I swear, Emmy, you're going to be a pip of an actress some day, and that's no lie"—after his enthusiastic words, Donald veered to a crafty squinting.

If Emmy Lou echoed his prediction, he could then smack his lips and feel that she would turn out to be a fast one, for in those days middledun householders and their progeny regarded actors as dissolute, wickedly gifted, socially inferior creatures and parents went into dudgeons at the slightest mention of their daughters, or sons, going on the stage.

"Emmy Lou, *why* didn't you try out for the Dram'

Club last semester? You'd have been a perfect scream in that Portia stuff, mu-uch better than Helen Peters was. She talked like she'd swallowed a hot potato half the time"—Ella's apple-cheeked face was devoid of everything except a desire to say brightly nice, and safely attacking, words.

"My, aren't you all feeding me butterscotch?"—the unimpressed diableries of a summer breeze were audible in Emmy's voice, skipping from the beautifully untouched inattention of her soul. "I'll never be 'n actress and I don't even *want* to be one. Seems to me, if you're always just pouring your heart out on the stage, why, you don't have much left when it comes to, well, when it comes to . . . to really loving somebody."

"Sure thing, that's why all of those actress babies are always loose and always cutting up to beat the band"—Donald beamed over what he considered a precociously devastating remark.

Dick had been silent—sudden fermentations in his heart. If Emmy Lou ever did go on the stage she'd be torn away and lost to him forever. She'd be toasted and snared then by all kinds of flashy, mashy, older men, with heavy wads and polished ways, and she wouldn't hang on to a chap who hadn't made his name yet and didn't know the world. *He* wanted to become the famous one, with Emmy Lou clinging to his sleeves and strengthening him with her advice, and, oh, just turning him hot and dizzy with her lips and arms and with the desire to become worthy of them. It *was* selfish to want to hold her down, ye-es, but, gee whiz—

the thought frightened him because it was counter to all the martial altruisms dinned into his ears at school and home—gee whiz, wasn't everybody selfish? A boy never knew *what* to believe, with his own horse-sense pointing one way, while all of the old, wise people, who ruled things, pointed the other. But girls, just so soft and lovely, with the funny, mixed-up shyness and cute boldness that made them weak and yet dangerous, like babies smiling and frowning before hairy-chested prize-fighters who couldn't get up enough heart to hit them . . . girls, who could be so beautiful, tenderly winsome, that they turned a boy to a stammering lout with nothing to give in return except his overpowering longing for them—they belonged in a home, where a man could strain his hide out to protect them and yet have an exclusive refuge to make him strong. They weren't made to go out and clinch with the hard, sweaty-faced rumpus of a world. . . .

O budding, ignorant sentimentality, so far removed from the one coined into dollars by shrewd panderers, and the treacle served by adult cowards, who employ it to soften their iron corsets—you have within you all of the unprotected sublimity held by one kind of youth. You are a wide-eyed, absurd dream of Arcadia, so quickly trampled on by the craven lusts and impositions of this earth. . . .

The four had strolled beyond the flower-beds and were standing under an arbor of Virginia creepers over wooden hoops when Dick said: " 'Course, Emmy'll never go on the sta-age—she's too nice a girl for tha-at. She and me 're going to stick together through thick

and thin—we're daffy about each other . . . aren't we, Em'?"

Emmy Lou gave him the frowny-smiley look of one who did not know whether to slap another, or kiss him—wasn't it just like a boy to hand out orders and act as though he were so all-fired confident that he scarcely needed to utter them? And wasn't it even more like a boy to play on a girl's desire to be nice, just to keep her from outstepping him and putting *him* in the shade? And wasn't it typical of a boy to be immediately, unshakably sure of a girl's love and joyously blurt out matters that should have been sweetly private between them? Yet, these very faults made Dick a lovably blundering, wistfully undisguised, unconsciously forlorn infant to her own seventeen-year-old heart, which was vastly superior in its own estimation and vastly eager to show its unusual age by forgiving the infant. His cocksureness was ludicrous to her but never offensive because it was so dependent on her permission for its happy semblances of authority. It would have been so easy to hit him, and so . . . unthrilling. . . .

Carve it in marble, raise it over the objections of a thousand men—most women love a man when he seems to hold a floundering, pliable, easily wounded helplessness underneath all of his brilliance, rudeness, maturity, or prosy dictation. . . .

Ella and Donald were looking at Emmy in a fixed, bright-eyed way as they waited for her to confirm Dick's words. One side of them, with a little unwitting malice, hoped that she would respond coquettishly and take the swelling out of his head, while the other

side wanted her to substantiate the idea of true-blue, dazzling romance, which was so appealing because it threw a glamour upon still-ungratified physical desires and made them more bearable, less wicked to themselves.

Emmy Lou's silence had lasted for a half-minute now, and Dick was hurt, worried, as he repeated: "Well, aren't we, E-em'?"

"Ye-es . . . ba-aby, but every one doesn't have to *know* about it. You do wear long trousers, Dick, but you certainly don't act like it. Why, if I got you a piece of cha-alk, I'll bet you'd write it all over the sidewalk in front of our house."

"Maybe I would! Hide 'n' hi-ide—it makes me tired."

"You needn't be afraid of u-us. We won't tell a soul—will we, Ella?"—Donald loved those pacts of silence which made the frowned-upon, animal impulses of youth deliciously important, conniving, in the face of that deluge of watchful, wrathful purity advanced by teachers, parents, relatives.

"Of co-ourse we won't"—Ella's lasciviously puffy face became beautiful for a moment—the defiant, gypsy-free, barely scratched conspiracy with which youth picks its flesh-longings from the mud of other people's angry disapproval.

The four had walked away from the arbor and were crossing a green clearing hedged by whortleberry trees.

"Oh, go ahead and te-ell. See if I care"—Dick enjoyed the feeling of a plotting beau but this was superseded by his prideful desire to kiss Emmy Lou "front

of the whole world" and thus attain the manhood which was so staggering-kneed, so laggardly and untried to him.

"Well, *I* care if you don't"—Emmy Lou felt that the rash lambkin needed a spanking which would conceal her admiration of his rashness. "Father doesn't want me to go with Jewish boys and we're not old 'nough to put our foot down and do's we please. We've *got* to keep it in the dark, Dickie, 'less you're looking for a-all ki-inds of trouble."

"Don't *I* know all about it, don't I. My dad won't even let me invite Don' up to the ho-ouse 'cause he's a Cath'lic and we're Presbyterians"—Ella's face had a temerity a little frightened at itself. "Gee whiz, I don't see what's so terrible if we do belong to different churches, long's we all believe in Go-od."

"Well, it does make some difference in Dick's case" —Donald felt that they were all wading beyond their depths and had better swim back before the bogie-man caught them. "Suppose you and Em' get married some day, Dick—suppose you do? Who'll you have to splice you up then, a minister 'r a rabbi?"

"It's all hunky-dory to me—I'd let the old people fight that out, and I'd run off with Emmy in a ji-iffy . . . if they wouldn't let us get married."

"Ye-es yo-ou wo-ould"—Donald was sarcastically serenading his own lack of courage—"and have a big copper drag you back by your coat-tails!"

"Oh fiddlesticks—they can't separate a man from his own lawful wife."

"Ca-an't they though?"—Donald's voice had a knowing ring.

The legal details which he had overheard from his older brother, a lawyer, made him feel portentous and rabidly grown-up, and he continued: "Suppose you don't know *this*—if a girl's under twenty-one she can't hook up without the leegul consent of her old man 'n' woman, 'n' the same goes for a boy too."

"I'd never da-are to run 'way from my parents"—Ella's face had lost the beauty and gone back to longings petulantly avenging their own tentative subversions. "Don't you think *I'd* ever ruin *my* reputation and have people hand me the cold mitten where-ever I went. Not me-e."

Emmy Lou had listened to the others with a sadness which she could not define—a moony, formless feeling that all of them, herself included, were tied-up weaklings sputtering out words in a big cage to give themselves an imitation of free-choice, spunkiness. The preceding words were scarcely the ones within her seventeen-year-old mind, but a shapeless feeling drove toward them nevertheless. She interpreted this hooded load as moping 'cause she wasn't grown-up and couldn't do as she pleased, and she called upon the broadly hopeful sunlight and all the green curlicues of buoyancy around her feet, but the heaviness would not quite die. Then she spoke to make it seem a soundless fantasy killed by the audible, devil-may-care reality of words, oh, any kind of words, just to tell herself how glad she was to be alive and seventeen on this promising summer day.

"Goodness gracious, why are we all so mo-opey today? We're all just starting to li-ive . . . 'n' all kinds of things can happen to us 'fore we die. Good ones too, heaps and heaps of them."

"You're darn tooting they can"—Dick snatched at the easy escape. "For Pete's sake, let's cut out this deep, spooky stuff and have a good time!"

"I'm with you there"—Donald threw down the croquette-box and was overjoyed to dismiss the onerous novelty of thinking. "Do I get a game at la-ast, or will I have to whack the ball all by myself?"

"There he goes again"—Ella touched straight finger-tips in a humorous sign of prayer. "I suppose we'll have to play with him or listen to this all afternoon!"

They set up the wire hoops and then cracked the wooden balls with their mallets, and shrieked with laughter when one of the players placed a foot upon his ball and then drove an opponent's sphere yards away from the scene of action. They giggled at verbal trifles, and broke into popular songs ending in gleeful derision when someone sang a high note out of tune, or couldn't reach it. They sought for excuses to brush against each other's bodies and make the contacts seem accidental, and shouted exhortations and praise for crucial moments and good shots in the game. The motion of their arms and legs was a carefree, blood-zipping, bone-swishing eloquence beside which thought became a tiny, cock-eyed, fuzzy-black gnome beautifully shaken up and almost ignored in their heads, and parents receded to argus-eyed but harmless spirits on another planet. They should have been exiled to

a grassy, high-walled world of their own, there to become cleansed, and gradually naked, and independently mating, saddened, playing, far, far beyond the revered harnesses and interferences of an earth so notoriously afraid to be itself—Emmy Lou, with her wordless, child-streaked, softly lusting harbinger of maturity; Dick, with his battle of moody-mousiness and sentimental Dutch-courage; Ella, with her endless, borrowed, whitish prattlings to hide the fear that "she'd be found out 'cause she'd let Don' go too far with her"; and Donald, with the soul of a monkey and a slinky voluptuary beginning to drag down the pit-a-pat of his heart.

II

Ethel Filkins was singing, but the sweetly sensuous croon held no clues to her heart. Pain in the morning, pain in the night, married to scorning, sister to fright. Oh, why does life gag people so and why does it hide the muffling with travesties of music, when all the truly releasing sounds have fled? Why does it take all of the word-melted, heart-stroking, surging clairvoyance that music can be, and reduce it to the lying contentment of a jingle? Why did it fall upon a symphony of curiosity and rend it, defile it, until it shrank down to the softly drugged pettishness of this woman, Ethel Filkins, crooning the songs of her day in a rocking-chair on the back-porch of her apartment? He who knows the answers to these questions could become a god—yes, a god, too infinitely tolerant to find any need for love and hatred, with mortals ever ready to stone and revile him for the great peace upon his tongue.

But Ethel Filkins had never been stoned and reviled by the people in her life. Some of them had cheated and coerced her in her youth. Some of them had brought her little, pale pink joys too instantly swallowed and forgotten. Some of them had pricked her to the stealthiest of grudges. But no one had been able to hurt her, to break into the well-stuffed bag of her heart, swung to and fro by a thick dislike for

dreams of any kind. No one had ever attacked her, yanked her from self-esteem. Strong love, with its ever wilder twinings of heedless yes and no, had never forced her down to her knees and given her a measureless pity for other stricken creatures.

As she rocked on the porch and sang, she had nothing in her head but plans for supper and the determination to give "a good piece of her mind" to her daughter. Mrs. Rollins, choir-leader of the neighboring Baptist church, had called an hour before and made a complaint about Emmy Lou. Emmy Lou had been dragged to a church-social by her mother on the previous evening—a gurgly-vapid, frilly affair, with sponge-cake, charades, pink lemonade, and refined songs considered more high-class than the street-ballads of that time. Dear Mrs. Rollins, whose ears were always rendered more acute by the inner passion for culture henpecked by propriety, had caught Emmy singing shameful words under the screen of the other girlish voices. Among the incredible offenses, the dear old watchdog had listed: "Nero, my dog, has fleas" for "Nearer, my God, to thee," and "glory, glory, have an onion" for "glory, glory, hallelujah!", and "you're losing them, you're losing them" for "Jerusalem, Jerusalem," a-and, most enormous crime of all, "just break your snooze and stutter" for "Just break the news to mother."

To Ethel Filkins, these misdemeanors were not only sacrilegious but horrifyingly unladylike. She could have understood them in a boy, for *men* were cantankerous, practical brutes who had to be tongue-lashed into a respect for higher things. A girl going

on eighteen, however, and still without good manners, serious poise at the right times, was a shocking affront to the traditional niceness, the high ideals, ingrained in the ladies among her sex. Mrs. Filkins tried to find an explanation for her daughter's conduct and decided that she had been spoiled by the downright squashiness of her father—giving the child an extravagant allowance of three dollars a week; letting her sleep in the hammock on the porch, with nothing on but a kimono; actually laughing that time when she told her stout Uncle Herbert that he had a pillow tied on in the wrong place; defending her, last Halloween, when she stuck pins in all the doorbells downstairs, as though she were still a child at grammar-school. . . .

Mrs. Filkins continued the catalogue, with increasing satisfaction plus an annoyance almost too pleased to be an annoyance, for in this way she dismissed her own responsibility and hugged the premise that Emmy Lou was not inherently bad—not unlike her mother. No, it was just a dash of the father's Old Nick, manlike commonness—Henry was a fine, faithful, mettlesome, strong, kind, hardworking man—Mrs. Filkins suddenly realized that blaming him too much would stigmatize the discrimination she had shown in marrying him. Her mind was creaking with the unwonted labor of dividing thought into gray shades between ebony and panegyrics, but the space between anger and complacent loyalty had to be crossed somehow. Her husband did have a low sense of humor, and he could be . . . well, almost vulgar sometimes, but this was because, oh, because he belonged to the ma-ale

sex . . . the hairy, guffawing, troublesome, lovable set of brutes who could be angels when a woman lured out the best parts of their characters.

How a woman loved a man when he had a little of the devil in him and couldn't stand him when he had too much of it, and felt like shaking him when he didn't seem to have a single fault. . . . Here, here, these were monstrous ideas for a married lady of forty-three to be thinking. What had come over her? Must have soaked up some of the bosh in that last trashy novel she had read. Must have . . . should have . . . do-on't be-e fli-ighty-y . . . getting o-old. . . . No, still like it. . . . Ethel, what a terrible . . . stewed carrots, succotash . . . that's right, think of practical things . . . pra-acti-i . . . got a good six years more, but Henry . . . E-ethe-el, will you stop this terrible . . . the yolks of two eggs and a tablespoon of flour . . . flowers . . . pinned an aster to my breast and then his hand . . . didn't I shake all over?—wasn't used to it. . . . Takes more than that now . . . E-ethe-el, I'm asha-amed of . . . can't understand, at your age . . . decent, honored life . . . not a soul can point a finger at . . . can't they? . . . Oh well . . . fifteen years . . . nobody knows . . . still it did . . . no-obo-ody kno-ows . . . God forgives everything . . . what possessed you then? . . . we are His creatures . . . shall not want . . . good six years . . . Anna didn't change till fifty . . . E-ethe-el . . . so stubborn . . . remember your decent . . . cambric ruffles . . . slipped off so easily . . . cambric . . . E-ethe-el . . . remember what you are . . . respect of every-

body . . . so nice to have it . . . so nice to look down on other . . . so very, ve-ery ni-ice. . . .

More and more jumbled, Ethel's mind stumbled on, while random tattlings rising from her heart made this mind stop and look around with the old, inextricable demurring of fright and thrice-flogged memories of pleasure. Just a skirmish on the top of a complacency made solid by many years and ready to become angry at the least assault upon it . . . ready to tear the heart out of anything that remotely resembled a debilitating dream, and then caress it for a second, almost involuntarily, and then tear out its heart again, with redoubled vigor, to forget the tissuey flick of rare relenting which no breast is entirely free from, no matter how smug it may have become . . . maul it, strip it to bleeding and yet painless shreds in an instant, smother it beneath one hundred of the bromides with which sleep borrows a soul from the church-pew to take the place of the real soul trampled out in youth. . . .

Emmy Lou strode out on the porch; bent over to kiss her mother's cheek; fondled a row of geraniums in a wooden box on the porch railing; looked breathless, and imp-sprinkled, and twelve.

"Where've you been till five?"

"In the pa-ark."

"Goodness me, I think you li-ive the-ere."

"Do not."

"That's no way to talk to your mother."

"I don't live there, mother dear—is that better?"

Silence.

"Mother, you're angry about something—I just know it."

Silence.

"Mother, you *are* angry, I know you are."

"I've good cause to be."

Silence.

"Mighty good cause."

Silence again, while Emmy Lou sat on a camp-stool, with her legs properly squeezed together—her habit of crossing them brought tirades and she didn't want to add fuel to the already crackling blaze. She looked at her mother with the peculiar smile of one who was about to be whipped but could not take it quite seriously, and she said to herself that "the old hornet was going to sting again" and tried to be aghast at having said it, and compromised by feeling sorry that she was not quite as sorry as her love for her mother should have made her—the now half-hearted, now painstaking, self-slapping of a girl who did not love but shrank from the crime of this omission and was forever forcing herself to believe that she did.

Popping out of nowhere, a memory pestered her—an incident which had happened when she was eight. Her mother had forbidden her to go out and play because she had just soiled a freshly laundered, dimity dress—a little boy had streaked it with mud because he had stolen a piece of soap and wanted to enter the washing-business at the expense of the dress. His ensuing applications of soap and puddle-water, against her struggles, had turned it into a motley mess indeed. Mrs. Filkins, after administering sundry shoulder-

shakings—she couldn't find the dough-patter—had commanded Emmy Lou to remain in the house. After the mother had left to shop at the grocery, however, three little boys and girls had stationed themselves in front of the parlor bay-window and taunted Emmy Lou until she ran out "to sass them back" at closer range. Mrs. Filkins, discovering her daughter on the sidewalk, had hustled her inside and spanked her lustily. Emmy remembered the frenzied crescendo, punctuated by sobs: "I di-idn't di-irty-y i-it, mo-othe-er," "I di-idn't di-irty-y i-it."

After the spanking, she had slouched out to the back-porch and made faces at her mother—shielded by the closed kitchen-door. Taking her by surprise, Mrs. Filkins had opened the door just as Emmy Lou was in the midst of a ferocious screwing-up of features, with tongue sticking out and nose upturned. Emmy Lou remembered the look on her mother's face, too petrified and really heart-shocked to be angry; remembered her own splurge of fear followed by throes of contrition because she had been ugly to her dear, sweet mother, even if mother hadn't understood that she wasn't to blame about the dress—a maltreated innocence turned to a feeling of quivering culpability because it hadn't excused the unjust punishment dealt out by the sacred, only queen within its life. The after-scene was swathed, secondary—tears, amazed reprimands, the perplexed sobriety of her father. Only the memory of a fight between love and a germ of hatred persisted—a fight that had left its little sore upon an inner breast more frail than an inkling of spring-mist

and yet sturdier than the wind which shoves this mist away. . . .

The mother had assailed Emmy Lou for five minutes now, with a voice and spirit too self-bulky to be exasperated and yet sincerely disturbed. Her daughter's silence would have been relished by Mrs. Filkins, if Emmy Lou had hung her head, wrung her hands, and shown signs of the abased transgressor. But Emmy Lou looked at her mother as though she were doing her utmost to compose her face against a smile, or turned her head and stared down at the back yard, or shook her head in the manner of an elf listening to a thunder and unable to separate it into words. The mother's voice took on that shrillness which springs from complete lack of understanding.

"You might look at me when I'm talking to you—I've never seen such a girl!"

"I didn't mean to turn away, mother. I've been listening to every word you said."

"Well, you certainly don't act as though you were sorry for what you did."

Silence.

"I said, you don't act as though you were so-orry-y for what you did. It won't be long before you're eighteen—eighteen years old, d'you know that?"

"Yes, of course I do."

"Well, don't you think a girl of eighteen ought to have the manners of a grown-up la-ady?"

"I suppose so."

"You su-uppo-ose so-o? That's a fine answer indeed."

"Oh mother, you mean to be fair, I know you do, but . . . but you jump on me for every little thing. That goody-goody Mildred Stevens was singing the very same words and you're always throwing her up to me and saying you wished I'd be like he-er. I wasn't the only one at all. Why, at least four other girls were singing just like I did."

"Well, if that's the truth, I certainly don't know what's coming over you girls nowadays. You're all beginning to act like a crowd of . . . of Hottentots!" . . .

Skip over the remaining words; Emmy Lou's half-meant promise "not to do it again"; the mother's return to semi-mollified intrenchments. When humor is absent, and needle-jabs serve as sword-slashes, and the hardness of a nearly sightless middle-age, the guiltless elasticity of youth, meet in a futile impact, then what remains?—tragic, or dully stifled potentialities. Turn away from the window for a moment, lest sadness and boredom press too heavily upon the eyes and ears. Humor, the balm that washes hearts clean for an instant and gives versions of reality the pleasure of lightly attacking themselves, will make a tardy arrival. . . .

Emmy Lou went inside to change to a house-dress and apron, and help her mother with preparations for supper. Mrs. Filkins rocked in the chair and knitted a pale blue muffler, with a loving concentration. Few people are without a trace of artistic conscience and knitting was Mrs. Filkins' aesthetic atonement. Optimism returned to her, aided by the more impersonal

immersion in her task, and she felt that Emmy Lou's talking-back and cutting-up were only skin-deep and could be eventually castigated out of existence. Ethel Filkins verged on tallness and had straw-colored hair peppered with gray. Within the nearly pear-shaped area of her face, some mote of roguishness had been stamped out, leaving the tricky scar of a mouth and dark pouches under gray eyes: leaving, too, that indefinable objection between spleen and kindness which does not end with the lines of a face. Emmy Lou had borrowed Ethel's straight nose and filched some of the mother's warlike stubbornness and unbreakable self-belief, but these transactions ended the resemblance. In every other respect, this mother and daughter stood on opposite sides of the invisible chasm and fought for a kinship which did not, could not, exist.

Emmy Lou's father, Henry, owned a modest drugstore situated near his home. He had once entered the race for alderman of his ward, on the Democratic Ticket, and had been decisively beaten—a defeat which he attributed to "those dirty saloon-hellers hanging 'round Fifty-first and State Street." While not exactly one of the main pillars in his community, he was nevertheless among the well known and recognized supports, and men often came to him for advice in business matters, or to settle the affairs of the local Odd Fellows' branch, in which he was a minor potentate. These facts were extraordinary lies in their relation to Henry's spirit and motives. He was a poet who had once gasped for air in the churchyard of other people's maladies (the maladies were dignified

under the name of common-sense). The poet had an earth-bound mouth and could not withstand the scoffings of bilious people in his environment. Abandoning the abortive scribblings of his youth, this bard retired from Henry's daily life and became a hermit within the father's heart, but the matter did not entirely end here. At odd moments Henry became conscious of the detached weight in his heart; hated and sheepishly cuddled it in a pathetic rotation; punished it with every device—higglings over money . . . oaths against "prettified fripperies," moral genuflections, nudging ribaldries. It was useless. The fundamentals in Henry's nature could not be downed, and when he stroked a flower—taking care to peer around him first and be certain that no one was observing—the poet laughed softly and became deathless in the answering smile upon this man's face. When he sat and looked at a homemade, heart-shaped valentine that he had once lacked the courage to send away, it was not mere sentimentality that made him hold it for half an hour and read over and over again the crudely stabbing verses composed in his adolescence. At such times a word-slaying, slow-breathing tolerance, a feeling of incalculable separation from the life he knew, crept over him. Then he remained silent for hours, while Ethel, fussy and cackling like a menaced hen, wondered "what in the name of mud that man could be angry over now." When he kissed her and explained that he had been a thousand miles away and just daydreaming about nothing, her impoverished imagination ascribed the matter to a touch of anæmia, and she

advised him to go riding more and take a tonic—usually *Peruna,* which was the alcoholic nectar of alleged teetotalers in those days.

To say that Henry loved Emmy Lou would have been meaningless, since his emotions toward her were so riddled with flagellant and comradely purposes, and so enslaved by moods of distrust and fidelity which refused to recognize each other's existence within the man's consciousness. . . . Picture Henry's heart as a dungeon with one small window looking out upon an inner garden. Long neglected, because the gardener has locked himself up in that cell which has always the space of a world to practical people, the garden has been raped by hosts of weeds—the wild, dirt-loving, unnurtured profusion of growth, which seems to be infinitely humble and yet holds a promiscuous naturalness forever ready to over-run the orderly artifices within hearts . . . and life.

Within his cell, the gardener has a daughter and a wife. He married the latter because she could not detect the suicide of his dreams nor hear their skeletons marching in single file on some dark night, and because she could help to persuade him that their death had not wrenched his eyes from the sockets of his flesh-and-blood head. He married her, too, because a subtle chit, with arrogance and tenderness scarcely distinguishable from each other in the aura around her body to him, had jilted him for another man, left him with a hated chimera in place of the closely warm romance he had once believed in.

The daughter within his cell is only a vestal, warmly

acceptable receipt for the price he paid in changing from one world to another. She is also a symbol of her mother, young and pleasing again, transfused with the father's heart-blood to make her a little more intelligent, spirited. The recreant gardener loves this first daughter with the unstirred, pillowed, proper feeling that passes for love in dungeons of the kind wherein he lives, but a second image of his daughter—also named Emmy Lou—alone has the power to strike his heart. The second Emmy Lou lives outside in the neglected garden and vainly, silently, indirectly begs her father to leap through the window and join her. She keeps a few of the flowers still growing: sprawls on the weeds and strengthens them with the gleam of her nakedness; lifts arms to the roof of a sky and causes the gardener to raise his own arms apprehensively to the little ceiling, above which his fancies dare not grow within the cell.

Sometimes he looks out of the window and watches her as she waltzes with the odors of rhododendrons and makes them visible with stately nuances of motion. The revelation brings him a flat-footed, denuded feeling and then he hates this dancing accusation outside: longs to inveigle it back to the dungeon, where he can blend it into the first Emmy Lou from whom he derives comfort and obedience. Again, he tries to crawl through the window, but the opening is too small and the stones scarcely know that they are hindering him. At other times he ignores the garden: tells himself that the cell is a celestial home made of truth and splendid prudence: tells himself that the

first daughter alone exists and that the one in the garden is only a fear, only the specter of unruliness, of dead dreams, in his past life rising to confound him.

His efforts are unavailing. A song of poisoned hopes incredibly resurrected, of former, fine impulses now regarded as evil and insanely trivial, floats to him from the garden-weeds. He climbs back to the window, with a livid dirge of youth on his face. He looks down at the second Emmy Lou with love and hate touching in an exhausted torpor, scarcely knowing that they touch. He longs to beat her and kiss her at the same time, and, thus longing . . . falls to sleep. . . .

The allegory has ended: the surface play starts again: hobgoblins and laughters pave the way for action. . . .

Henry Filkins was saying grace with head lowered over the kitchen-table. "For what we are about to receive, O Lord, we thank Thee"—the words slurred into each other, moved by a pneumatic sense of duty. The words were little more than air pushing out an even lighter whiff of formal gratitude. Emmy Lou felt empty and casual beneath her muttering. Ethel repeated the words in a low, clear tone, for Christianity was urgently real to her—bread and wine hoarded by all of the emotional penuries within her. Henry raised his head, with the look of a man coming out of mild ether, and the supper began.

Below auburn hair skeined with gray, his face was mortally wounded, with humor barely keeping it alive —blue, squinting eyes and a hillocky nose above thick

lips. The suspicion of a double-chin and cheeks puffed out a little under the eyes spoke of a well-fed decay which the eyes contradicted. The eyes were callow and wounded and . . . a little mad. The eyes revived only when humor came from the lips. Then they held the boundless impatience of a boy, staring out of a fat face that was little more than putty slapped upon a leaner, still-cherished one. . . . Frayed words came from the thick lips.

"Joe Harris wanted me to fill a prescription on tick. He hasn't been working lately."

"You ga-ave it to him, of course. You'd give the shirt off your back if *I* didn't hold you down."

"We-ell, I don't think my shirt's in much danger, Ethel—size seventeen wouldn't fit most chaps."

"That's right, joke your way out of it."

"Absolutely—I'm not even stingy with jokes."

Emmy Lou stroked his hair—she had a deep fondness for this father but she did not understand him. His smiling leniencies, followed by moral angers, made him so much of a bear and a pal crowded into one that she couldn't decide whether she was dodging claws or taking gifts from a dearie. Her fondness tottered: fled from questions: sensed an eventual crucifixion, but would not die because it was a pent-up rhythm as unstayable as the flow of her blood. Intuitively, she perceived a ruefulness in his repressive commands: the absence of an utter edge: a note of pain too indelible and immutable to be directed quite at her, and the only language that she could shape it in was:

"Father doesn't feel right inside and then he takes it out on me."

"I don't see why you shouldn't help people, father" —her voice held a peaceful admiration. "Bet it makes you feel good too, you old, growl-patchy dear!"

"Growl-patchy? E-emmy Lo-ou, is that the way to talk to your fa-ather?"—the inevitable Ethel.

Henry pinched his daughter's cheek and waved a deprecating hand at his wife.

"Be quiet, Ethel—she didn't mean any harm."

"No, I suppose not, but it certainly didn't sound very respectful."

"Oh, mother, you're so terribly serious all the time. I'd never, never get over the shock if I heard you burst out laughing."

"Well really, I'm sorry I don't suit you, but there's a pile of things in this world to be serious about."

"That's all the more reason to forget them once in a while"—Henry put on his best, Pollyannish smile to hide the groan at his wife's finicky heaviness—it became irksome now and then after nineteen years of it.

Ethel launched into a recital of Emmy Lou's crimes at the church-social, and Emmy Lou listened with an emotion perilously close to hatred. What a tattle-tale her mother was—couldn't be content with having waded in herself but just had to tell father in the hope that he'd also fly up about it. Oh, yes, mother would say that anything was right if it made people act right, but she didn't follow this rule herself. When she was dusting the other day and knocked down

father's meerschaum and broke the stem, didn't she say herself: "Your father goes into such ta-antrums about his precious thi-ings—it won't hurt him if he doesn't know who did it"? . . .

O little ranklings and festerings within beginning lives, you can be so grotesquely infinitesimal to outsiders and so swollenly unfair to the handicapped, frail, forever-threatened honesty of youth—one rare kind of youth, that squirms against the age-old farce wherein hosts of atomical deceits pretend to merge into larger verities . . . the age-old spectacle of ethical crazy-quilts hanging out on the line to dry! . . .

Henry interrupted the wifely outpouring and spoke with a negligent grin.

"Yes, I know, Ethel—she shouldn't do such things, but I haven't much use for Madge Rollins either. If that old hen ever minded her own business she'd have to sit down and twiddle her thumbs day and night."

"He-enry-y."

"Yes, I mean it. . . . Besides, a girl ought to be good and sweet right down in her heart, certainly, but she doesn't have to be an angel in every little thing."

"I'm surprised at you, Henry."

"Sure, you were surprised when I asked you to marry me and you've stayed surprised ever since, I guess."

Emmy Lou tittered and Ethel looked hurt, though in reality she was only too confused to decide whether she should be pleased, or not—her husband's last remark had been rather bold in front of the child.

"I think we *might* keep such things to ourselves"

—her face strove to look reproachful and ended up by looking composed. "Besides, I think you're entirely too lenient with Emmy . . . entirely. I *didn't* mind the other things so much but I certainly can't approve of singing: 'Nero, my dog, has fle-eas'! Why, it's a mortal insult to the blessed Saviour above us."

Henry's religious sense bowed to the virtues of this last remonstrance and he felt that it was time to utter a judicious reproof to his daughter—not too stinging, but one that would show that he wasn't completely encouraging her.

"Your mother's right there, Emmy. Dead right. I want you to kneel beside your bed to-night and ask God to forgive you for what you did."

Silence.

"D'you hear me, young lady?"

"Yes, father."

"And you're going to do what I've told you?"

"Yes, father."

"All right then, let's hear no more about it."

Ethel beamed at Henry's belated strictness and Emmy Lou felt squelched, sulky, disagreeing, without knowing why or caring whether she was justified. Grown-ups never lost a chance to put their feet down —love to know how they acted when they were seventeen. Got bossed brown themselves and taking it out on their children—would she be the same when she was a mother? Weird thought—simply couldn't imagine herself all heavy and snappy and tied down. Wonder if God himself didn't love a little fun sometimes, even if it did seem to be at his expense? The thought

dismayed her with its sheer brazenness but she clung to it while denouncing herself for having dared to shape it. The vision of her father, formed when he was defending her, disappeared—the appreciative play-boy, deaf to mean old busybodies, changed to an unhuman man uttering empty words which she had to accept as substantial because everybody believed in them. What was the sense in all of this praying—why couldn't a person just look up and say "I'm sorry," and then forget about it? Surely, God would know whether you meant it, even if you didn't kneel down and pour out words, and he'd *want* you to forget it instead of carrying it around and feeling unhappy. . . .

In his black alpaca store-coat, cream linen vest, and high, stiff "choker" around the neck, with a napkin tucked into it, Henry looked like a foolish viceroy at the court of dignity. Actual dignity is the rare moment of straight pride known only to unassuming people but aped by millions of Henrys and Ethels. Ethel wore a long, cretonne dress with a fichu of Battenburg lace on the upper back, and a high, bone comb rose from the rear of her rolled-down hair—the goose-girl who dreamed that she was a countess. But look at dear Emmy Lou, fresh and inviolate in a pink, cambric frock, high-necked, with large ruffles circling her body up to the waist. She feels ungirlishly padlocked in the corset which her mother has already forced upon her, but blood dances to make her ignore it, dances in a hundred swirls within the unbearable, untrussed newness of her head, dances until her very

thoughts attain a breeze-like vagabondage, leave her head and go tumbling over green spaces alive with night and love.

The flank-steak and string-beans have vanished: the iced tea has gone: Emmy Lou fidgets in her chair.

"Can I go out to-night, father?"—oh for the relief of escaping from these anxious, cooped-up words some day!

"Where were you planning to go, Emmy?"

"Oh, just down to the Parlor for a soda, and then I promised Amy I'd go with her and listen to the band-concert in the park."

"Sure there won't be any boys tagging 'long with you? . . . I don't like that crowd of young rascals hanging around that ice-cream dump—they're just a bunch of do-nothings with low ideas!"

" 'Course, some of Amy's friends *may* come with us, father, but they're awf'lly nice fellows. You needn't be afraid."

Jumping crickets, if they knew she was going to meet Dick Rosenstein!

"I really don't think we ought to let her gallivant out every night alone"—Ethel's theory was to be suspicious of her daughter on the basis of warning and now-derided memories—she herself had cradled foolish desires when she was young and unmarried, and lord knows what idiotic thing she might not have done if her parents hadn't ruled her with a firm hand. "Suppose I run over to her Aunt Mary and ask her if she'll go along with the girls? They certainly ought

to have an older person with them o-once in a while, and I know Mary will be only too glad to go."

Emmy Lou stuck out her tongue invisibly. You bet Aunt Mary would be "o-only too gla-ad to go-o"—the buzzy old-maid! She'd had a sweet time with her dear Aunt last week . . . oh, such a sweet one. Dear Awntie had scolded a boy for not immediately tipping his hat: and scolded her niece for being nearly eighteen and not yet knowing how to hemstitch: and asked her not to stare so much at the men passing by: and talked about the church-bazaar for one, solid hour, and . . . ugh, Aunt Mary! "Well, I won't go out then, if she's going to be on top of us"—Emmy Lou lowered her eyes to hide the anger in them. "I don't see what's wrong in walking around the park with my school-chums. All the other boys and girls do it."

"I'm not responsible for the way other families raise their children"—Henry was looking out of the garden-window and using moral words to dismiss his dread.

Silence.

"I know you're a good girl, Emmy, but you're not old enough to know how to act if a boy should get gay with you."

A laugh healed Emmy Lou's smartings for a moment, though she did not dare to vent it in sound—if it was old for people to think horrible things about innocent fun, then she hoped she'd never grow up . . . the old rumbly sillies. . . . Besides, it was a question of what a girl deeply wanted—if she *wanted* to spoon with boys, she'd manage to sneak off and *do* it, no matter how much her parents raved and watched her.

If she didn't want to, she might be driven into it just to spite the old things, and from a feeling that she might as well try a little of the *game* since the *name* was going to be thrust upon her anyway. Besides, if a girl did love a boy, did kiss and hug him, what in the name of Pete was so terrible and ugly about it? She shivered at the enormity of this feeling and yet refused to desert it. Oh yes, a girl had to be formally engaged to him and sit with him in the parlor, with her coughing, ear-stretching parents in the next room . . . sit there, never knowing when they might bust in, with some excuse: never daring to vent any comment that might not please the nearby sentinels. . . .

A two-minute silence reigned before Emmy Lou rose and said: "All right, father, I'll stay in to-night. If I'm going to be treated just like a ba-aby, I'll go upstairs and ask Mrs. Collins if I can't play with little Josephine."

Silence.

"Guess you'll be satisfied then, father."

"Don't be so sarca-astic—I don't like it one bit. . . . We're only taking care of you till you get sense enough to take care of yourself"—this from Ethel.

Silence.

"You'd be heaps better off if you loved us ha-alf as much's we love you."

Emmy Lou sighed inwardly—was love always spying on people and telling them what they shouldn't do? That certainly wasn't the love that she felt for Dickie, though her parents would have called it outrageous if they had known of its existence.

As Henry looked at his daughter and listened to her last words, he was assailed by a pang which he could not immediately analyze—a yearning that made his heart a more quickly beating stranger. All of his thrice denied envies, under the guise of a stern solicitude, became palsied and could not speak the repressive words which they still feebly longed to utter. Then a mangled wistfulness rose to life and accused him of having tortured it, and his daughter's face, which had seemed obnoxiously resentful and disobedient only a moment past, now became irresistibly wounded and appealing to him. A memory pointed a finger at him in his head and resisted all of his efforts to whisk it away—the memory of a boy standing in a cottage-yard, on a bright, summer day, and white-hot with rage because his father had forbidden him to drive to the county-fair with the girl of his choice. A gray-bearded, sclerotic man, waving his hands as though they held branding-irons and thundering against a lass who had been caught sparking in the churchyard with Henry's rival. . . . Ugh, how far off and yet hauntingly near it was, like the embalmed uprising of another person long since slain within the present man. Yes, he had been a wild one in his youth and he was forever afraid that Emmy Lou might have inherited something of this reprehensible strain and forever determined to stamp it out within her, if it dared to show its head, but . . . the embalmed memory almost seemed to breathe, to be on the verge of a moan, to look at him with eyes no longer unlit. . . . Dear, hurt, misunderstanding Emmy girl—he didn't need to be

quite so harsh with her. He could loosen the reins just a little without spoiling or endangering this highstrung daughter of his. Youth was quick to seize upon fancies of injustice and wring anger from them, when older people refused to allow them moments of harmless playing. . . . He walked up to his daughter and patted her on the head.

"You go on out and enjoy yourself—I'm pretty sure I can trust you, Emsy girl. Only remember this—I'll expect you to be in by ten-thirty, ten-thirty sha-arp, like you always are."

"Of course I will—that's understood"—Emmy Lou kissed him in her flush of joy at the unexpected escape.

Three hours of independent heaven and Dickie plum!

"There you go again, lecturing her one minute and spoiling her the next"—Ethel was peeved at this jumping-jack husband of hers because he made her feel like a subordinate with no control over her own child. "*I* have nothing to say about it, I suppose."

Henry regarded her with a mournful shake of the head, in which his soul woke up, barely moved—what a one-track, hidebound, never-seeing woman Ethel was. Lord knows, he was decent and sensible enough but he couldn't hold a split candle to her. She carried it too far, made virtue and restraint look and sound like a sentence to jail and not a reasonable amount of freedom within certain recognized limits.

"Now, Ethel, you can't chain a child to older people every night—that's ridiculous. Let's both have a little

confidence in our child for a change. It won't harm us any!"

"Just as you sa-ay"—Ethel was appeased because he had linked both of their attitudes together and thus established an equality of authority over Emmy Lou. "If I'm too strict with Emmy I certainly don't mean to be. I love her just as much as you do, Henry."

She kissed her daughter lightly on the cheek, while Emmy Lou turned up her nose ever so slightly and then felt barely conscience-stricken at her lack of response—an emotion impatiently brushed aside by the desire to hurry off to her chums in the ice-cream parlor. What did all of these dry, skimpy, primpy words mean to her? Life was calling—a little, flouncing-up, forlornly independent breath of life, away from the stifling "beneficence" of parents, the soulless propriety of a home where every crack and seam had been boresomely memorized. Life was whispering, gurgling, prodding . . . and brandishing a violin made of hope no longer absurd!

III

As she walked down the street, in her straw toque decked with a profusion of violets, leaves, and green wire stems, Emmy Lou made her long, lavender skirt balloon out with the haste of her legs, and her little bosom had a racy, clog-dance poem between and underneath the long-sleeved, white peekaboo shirtwaist. . . . "Ickie-Dickie, thought he'd be tricky, thought he could fool Emmy Lo-ou. . . . Wash your lips, they're sweet and sticky—she doesn't need any glu-ue!" . . . Drivel, like a little mandolin whiling away the tedium of all your strong, deferred hopes . . . soapsuds and kisses . . . cool pantalettes . . . shivery night airs . . . lollypops for trouble . . . cheeks together with a strength that no hatred can pry apart. . . . Oh, Emmy Lou, tell them what fools they are. Tell them with every light-stab in your eyes.

The middle-July evening was a bell-clinky rambler, poking his breezes into all sorts of places and wondering why people didn't emulate him, why they walked so stiffly down little paths and sidewalks—something of the subconscious impertinence that stirred in Emmy Lou's heart. . . . Strawberries and cream were sour compared to this night, so why did most people look as though they had just swallowed a glass of vinegar? Weren't people funny when they were grownup? Being grownup seemed almost like a penalty

inflicted on people for staying alive too long—punished and forced to sit in the classroom after the other children had gone, and then finding out that the door was locked and they couldn't get out . . . ever. But subconscious darkness, bereft of words, could not remain long within Emmy Lou's heart. Even exceptional nearly-eighteen has antidotes against all poisons—antidotes made of nothing more substantial than the flutter of an eyelash, the clicking of heels on cement, movements of legs able to travel to their immediate desire.

Frankel's ice-cream parlor, on the corner of Prairie Avenue and Fifty-fifth Street, was alive with mirth, guzzling, politely swathed sensuality cooling off the tiny, hidden bonfires. White globes over incandescent lights—the age of electrical hollowness had not yet arrived—darkly varnished tables and chairs: a marble-wooden soda fountain with nickel faucets . . . a mirror behind it, blazoned with small, Chinese lanterns and strings of paper daisies. . . . Yes, ugliness reigned in those days, in the great, scoured and moiling middle-herd, but it was a babyish, homemade, doll-like ostentation—it had not yet learned to spread out in bare, flat planes: to fling itself up in the vast, rose-gilt arches of a movie-palace: to spike the sky with a towering huddle of buildings: to lure academic modulations, balanced uglinesses, into its billboards and shops. . . .

Emmy Lou trotted into Frankel's and approached a table where two boys and three girls were sitting. Amy Gerwig, Emmy Lou's best girl-chum, was seated

beside Cloyd Finch, her beau, while Donald, Ella, and Dick squatted on the other side of the long table. Ragamuffin Amy, the nerve-throb of her bunch, with a skin almost as dark as a quadroon's and a mass of mauvish brown curls, and a snippy, happily loony face that never kept still around its prominent nose and little, snapdragon mouth. The others, Emmy Lou excepted, often went into huffs over Amy's madcap jokes and disrespectful patters but they always forgave her in the end, accepted her leadership, because she stroked a more silent, daredevilish mood in their own semi-frightened breasts, and because: "O-Oh, she wasn't so goo-od, and she wasn't so ba-ad, but she kept her petticoats down . . . tra-la-la." In the world of these youngsters, immodesty was an unbelievable crime in public and a deliciously overlooked crime when it happened behind the door of a postoffice-game, or in the spontaneous mixup of touch-and-tag sport out in the park. "Bad words" were also atrocious when spoken out loud but somehow excusable when they were whispered with guilty giggles. Disrespect for parents was shocking, expressed in clear, persistent words, and yet it existed in a tacit understanding and became a courted relief when it limited itself to little, veiled outbursts. Caught between stalwart, animalish impulses and the bullying benevolence of older people, these youngsters tried to wriggle out of the situation by making concessions to both sides and playing a pathetic, inconsistent hide-and-go-seek game with that respectability which was too universal and unassailable to be openly disliked or attacked, in their world.

Emmy Lou, on the other hand, held an instinctive hatred for this world—a gunpowdery spirit of disobedience, with a romantic sigh snuggling behind it—and she needed only a strong push to send all of her moody, gentle immaturity into revolt. She liked Amy because the latter girl dropped her saucy rackets, in tête-à-têtes, and became softly serious about dreams of breaking away from parental orders and striding out into the great, unknown world—plans that were momentous and unheard-of even to the least conforming youngsters in their time and locale. Girls only went to work when their parents were "indecently poor" and never left home until they were married. . . .

The quartette broke into pert nothings of greeting while Dick, silently beaming, reached back and dragged over a chair for Emmy Lou. For a time the conversation was a rattly-flurried free-for-all, with each person interrupting the other at the beginning of sentences and everyone intent on avoiding thought with as many words as possible. The pipey voices of the girls and bass tones of the boys were snarled up in volleys of sound—the night-song of the Lilliputians escaping from Mr. and Mrs. Gulliver. . . . "Oh, Don's a dub when it comes to . . . He's not, he doesn't fib half as much as . . . A-All right, Lew Dockstader, I'll black up too and . . . According to your mo-other, you don't need to. . . . Oh ye-es?—let's take a look at you-our . . . Well, well, listen to George Primrose talking, the old boy him . . . (singing) 'Are you since-ere? If you're since-ere, then I'll let you buy me a bee-er, de-ear!' . . . Think you're sma-art, don't . . .

Well, you're only . . . I'm no-ot a tattle-tale—her father found out because . . . Oh, skiddoo-o! Twenty-three-e! How d'you know she wears . . . Yes, that's a good one on you, Don', how . . . Oh, you don't have to touch a girl to see if she's squeezed. . . . Will you stop being so di-ir-rty and . . . Ish ka bibble, doesn't mean anything to me, and besides . . . Oh, ring o-off, you funny . . . She messed up the lottoes every time and . . . Well, I didn't get sixty in Alg' like . . . If he's her beau, it's a shame the way she talks behind . . . Oh, *one* wouldn't be enough for he-er."

The second round of ice-cream sodas came and the seething of voices trailed off to occasional remarks. Amy was pressing knees with Cloyd Finch—a gangly youth with sandy hair and a loose mouth—and Donald peeked under the table and said: "Use a little paste, sweeties—they'll stick together better."

As she hastily withdrew her knee, Amy retorted: "Well, anyway, we don't hide in wa-agons like you and Ella do!"

This provoked a peal of laughter, for one of their standing jokes was the fact that Ella and Donald had been chased by a policeman on the previous Halloween and ignominiously yanked from an ice-wagon in back of the livery-stable where they had taken refuge.

"Sure, they started to get mushy in that wagon—"

Amy interrupted Cloyd—"and then the ice me-elted and the copper slipped in the wa-ater! That's how he found out where they we-ere!"

This started a second burst of laughter and then

Ella said: "That doesn't hold a candle to the time you and Cloyd were squishing in the park and Bob Sullivan hid in the bushes behind your bench and jabbed you with a ha-atpin!"

"Ye-ep, they thought it was mosquitoes and they kept on scratching till Bob started pi-inching!"

Donald's words raised a howl, after which Cloyd replied: "That's all right, but what I gave Bob was a-ple-enty, after I caught him!"

Emmy Lou grinned and said: "I'd like to see him try it on my Dickie Boy!"

"Dick *is* handy with his dukes, but nobody can run fast as Bob can—that's the trouble"—Donald drew up his shoulders with a despairing effort at belligerency.

"Run no-othing—I'd lay for him at school the next day and beat the tar out of him"—Dick was not a ruffian but he loved the words of one because they shielded a heart more easily hurt than his flesh.

The quips sped back and forth for a while and then seriousness settled on the group because the return to the honored jails was drawing nearer, and twilight—like a nomad mulattress—stood just outside of the doorway and muttered of exotic tensions which made the ice-cream parlor suddenly seem an insipid delay. In three couples, each just behind the other, they strolled over to Lover's Lane, a long curve of park benches sheltered by cicacia- and hydrangea-bushes and trees whose lower branches jutted over the gravel pathway. When they reached a water-fountain clearing at the beginning of the lane, the boys stepped aside for a short time to whisper over plans for capturing

elusive quarters on the next day, and the girls stood and chatted, filled with expectant sighs checked at their birth—a happy-miserable feeling that they would once more flirt with fulfillment without daring to let it grasp them.

"I'm getting a new dress to-morrow—it's got three rows of duckiest ruching on the shoulders and the loveliest buckles you ever saw"—Ella tried to distract her nervousness.

Emmy Lou and Amy uttered approving monosyllables and then remained silent—chatter about dresses was an excitement to fill in the gaps of a proper, daylight reality, but the night held too many larger shadows and goads.

"Cloyd was begging me the other night to elope with him and get married—can you imagine such silliness? And neither of us with a red cent to our names"—Amy looked flustered and yet a little proud.

"Well, gee whiz, if he's so anxious about it he could quit school and get a job and then ask your darling papa-a"—this from Ella.

"Oh, ye-es, and then we'd be told to wait two 'r three years, and they'd watch us like ha-awks all the time"—Amy was pinned between a tear and laughter.

"I'm not going to marry a-anybody for a long, long time—I'm going out and make my own living the very minute I graduate from High"—after she had spoken Emmy Lou's teeth bit into her lower lip, as though she were steeling herself to remain faithful to the impetuous iconoclasm of her words.

"Why E-emmy, I thought you were wild about Dick"—Ella felt a real consternation.

"Course I'm mad about him, but we can still love each other without getting married . . . ma-arri-ied, ma-a-arri-i-i-ied, that's all I ever hear. I want to go out and see things and do-o things . . . all kinds of things."

"My, but you a-are a sassy one—don't you want a home of your own and, uh"—Ella hung her head here —"and ba-abies too? Don't you?"

"Oh . . . I guess so . . . but I'm going to skip out first and see what the wo-orld looks like. You won't catch *me* spending all *my* life in Hyde Park, Chi-i'! No ma'am."

"Well, I think you're perfectly dre-eadful, so there. Girls aren't supposed to do such things, not ni-ice girls anyway"—a note of palpable envy betrayed Ella's words.

"Oh, heavens, what's so dreadful about it?"—Amy's iron expression was dismayed but not to that point where it would have ceased to become iron. "I'm going to do the very same thing soon's I'm nineteen, you just see if I don't! The boys can trip out and have their fun, oh su-ure, but *we've* got to be stick-in-the-mu-uds and stay home all the time. . . . Well, I'm not going to stand for it."

"Good for you, Am'—we'll show them something frisky before we're through"—Emmy Lou squeezed Amy's hand and felt roseately keyed-up.

The agreement of another girl in her own world made her feel much more resolved and less like a

lonely school-chit whistling in the darkness. The boys returned, skittish and importantly crammed with secrets, and the couples walked down the lane and dropped on leaf-shaded benches, one by one, with cursory farewells. After Emmy Lou and Dick had exhausted the first surge of kissing and hugging, they spoke words to ease the wilder desires in their hearts.

"I had a deuce of a time getting out to-night, Dick."

"So did I. The old boy wanted to drag me down to a party at my Uncle Ben's. I had to lie like sixty to get out of it."

Silence.

"Gee, Dickie, won't it be sweet some day when we can be our own bo-osses?"

"Don't make my mouth water, Em'. . . . D'you know, I've got a good notion to quit High and go to work. . . . Honest Injun. It's this way, Em'—long's I don't earn my own living I've got to take orders from the old people, and then . . . why, gee, then I'd have to wait ever so long before I could get hitched up with you."

"But aren't you going to study to be a lawyer, Dickie?"

"Oh we-ell, why can't I join some night-school and take it up there? I'm so darn tired of sneaking off to the park with you—I want to be alone with you and I want to tell other people to go to blazes!"

"Oh, Dickie, I know just how you feel"—They fell into another storm of kisses and hugs.

After a while she drew a little apart and asked:

"Dickie, why can't we wait a year and then run away together—I mean, without getting married."

She peered at him through the semi-darkness, anxious concerning how he would receive this naughty, unprecedented, delightfully implicating question. Not that she really thought it was so naughty—it was beautiful, sweet, and romantic—but even her own schoolchums, with the exception of dear Amy, would never, never have agreed with her. Caught between sublimations of physical desire and an almost universal opposition to them, she felt amazed at her own bravery and shiveringly determined beneath this amazement. Dick remained silent for over a minute and felt scandalized and hungrily assenting in a juxtaposition too stammering for immediate words.

"D'you really me-ean it?"

"Ye-es"—scarcely more than a whisper.

Silence again.

"But, Emmy, they'd only catch us and pull us back again."

"Not if we went wa-ay off—oh, hundreds of miles. We could pretend to be married, and live together, an' . . . and both of us could change our names and get some kind of jobs. You see, if bo-oth of us went to work then we'd be sure to have enough money to live on."

The amalgamation of scarecrows became too severe and lopsided for Dick, and he marveled at the note of cool, practical planning in her voice.

"But, Emmy, I . . . I love my folks too much to do tha-at . . . my mother anyways, and my sis' . . .

Ruthie, and, gee, Em', don't you care one teeny bit about your own folks? . . . If we did like you want, maybe you'd never see them again."

Emmy Lou wavered for just a moment and then the determination stood straight again—sick and self-accusing but held up by a terrifying inner force which she could not explain.

"I do love my father, Dick, but I *don't* love my mother and I don't care how awful it sounds either."

Silence.

"I suppose you think I'm a fri-ightful girl."

"No, it's not tha-at, but I don't see how you can be so cold about your o-own pe-eople."

"I'm *not*, but I don't see why I should let them tie me down all my li-ife. They'd never, never let me marry a Jewish boy. . . . Why, they'd go into a regular spa-asm if I just me-entioned it."

Silence again.

"And besides, I'm not going to get married for a-ages, Dickie—I want to go out and li-ive first. . . . Oh, I know you think I'm fri-ightful, Dickie boy."

Dick didn't know what to answer—insecurities, dismays, family-huggings, and longings for this strange, bold-tongued sweetheart were piled within his heart. Unable to face the entire confused load, so heavy for the self-appalled inexperience of his heart, he tried to dismiss it with evasive words.

"You're *not* frightful . . . you're a terribly, terribly brave girl, Emmy . . . a darn sight braver than I am. But, gee whillikins, we don't have to decide it all to-night, do we?"

Emmy Lou snatched at the chance to escape from a formidably uncertain future and return to the smoothly, crazily tugging summer night and the boy whom she adored because he was so physically dashing, self-sufficient, and so mentally and emotionally weak, distraught.

"Course not. You know I said we ought to wait a year anyway, and we've got plenty of time to talk it over, darlins. Oh, heaps and heaps of time."

Kissing each other again, with their lips in a moist insanity of possessiveness, they felt invincibly adult and immune to anything that vaguely resembled a problem. . . . When they drew apart again, she asked: "What time is it, Dick?"

"Three after nine, hons."

"Let's walk over to the island and watch the boats. . . . I didn't want to say anything but I'm being stung to death here! These skeets are simply te-errible!"

"That's the only reason I stopped kissing you—a big one was just boring into my leg!"

They laughed, as they rose and walked down the path, and their laughter had a strength which could not be disrupted by mosquitoes at one end, or conventional bogie-men at the other. They stood for a while on a bridge made of bark-covered branches and logs, and looked down at the rowboats with their cargoes of idle, trilling, water-splashing people—a humpty-dumpty version of happiness out on the water, which the summer night seemed to caress ever so gently lest it should break. Moonlight fell on the dark lagoon-water, like an impersonal tolerance soothing the

fluid travail of earth, and the blurry reflections of bushes and trees held an esoteric peace beneath all the endless ripples made by prows and oars.

"My, isn't it pretty to-night!"—Emmy Lou felt mistily entranced and treading upon air too magical to be recognized by words.

"Isn't it though! It kind of knocks my breath out, Ems, but . . . don't ever tell the boys I said so. They think it's sissy-like to go dippy over the moon."

"Oh, who cares about the-em?"—Emmy Lou snuggled against his shoulder and admired him for not having the usual boyish disdain for pretty sights.

They departed from the bridge and wandered around the island. Their hearts were heavy and light at the same time—deferment and vagrant approaches to desire immolating each other. As they were taking a short cut through a large, heavily close clump of bushes, to reach another path, Emmy Lou tripped on a buried stone and fell headlong. Dick knelt beside her, to pick her up, and she clasped her hands behind his head and pulled it down to her lips. Cruelly demented, blinding, a new emotion tore through his heart and killed the boy within him forever, and every visible particle of the scene, except Emmy Lou, flew out of his consciousness.

. . . . . .

Youth is the time when impetuous decisions survive to control the entire future life of a human being, but never immediately . . . an insidious gash seemingly healed but extending down invisibly . . . an acci-

dental revealment, propelled by outside malice and testing every singing crevice of a heart too inexperienced to realize what has happened . . . a knife, flicking the uncommunicative soul, leaving an influence that slowly rises until it gains bitter words years afterwards . . . a happiness remaining as an armor that can never be entirely pierced . . . a wisdom, trampled upon but rarely breathing in spite of every disregard. . . . Yes, you are at the old, blood-stained cross-roads, Emmy Lou. Chance, and an untamable straightness, nudeness, in your heart, will combine to fling you down the inevitable highway. . . .

The evening was toward the end of July and a mugginess in the air signaled an impending thunder-storm, as Emmy Lou walked down Prairie Avenue to her home. Her first episode with Dick on the wooded island, followed by a second one but an hour previous, gave her a sense of stealthy ingenuity no longer unrewarded—the feeling of tiptoeing over egg-shells to snare a pleasure which any misstep would lose—but otherwise she was still serene and intact. The pagan and the sentimentalist within her nature, sheering into their first, unsullied, headstrong release, could not rob her of peace nor give her wincings of shame, because sex was such a proud consecration to her. It was a sacredly pledging, heavenly, truthful escape from all of the little, dully cloaked lies in her environment. It was as solid and unquestioned as the very earth upon which she walked. It was her child-strong concept of beauty and therefore inviolate. She could not be ashamed because shame is the warfare with which fear

seeks to undermine victorious desire, exposure, and every part of her unsinged heart was united in one unreasoning momentum. Filled with dreams and recalcitrance, and yet innately lacking the articulate talent which could have expressed them in detached sounds, movements, figures, she gave them to sex and changed it to an unconscious art—her poignant, stripped, pathetic form of self-expression. Romance became a sigh of creation: caresses found an undefiled song of wildness: emotions stampeded with all the force of a religious revival-meeting. Emotions, at other times, held all the instinctive wisdom of a century-old motherliness as she hugged "her ba-aby bo-oy" to her breast and whispered into his profusion of brown curls. . . .

Too much grave nonsense has been written about morals and the pangs of deserted virtue. Moral injunctions must fall upon fertile soil—upon hearts and minds already prepared to receive them, already self-enslaved—for otherwise their rantings, rationalities, take on the senseless effect of gibberish seeking in vain to shatter the concentration of a living poem which does not hear them! When sex is not the old, struggling, deliciously forbidden feast of nerves to a girl first experiencing it, she can remain as inwardly undisturbed and natural as a naked child tasting an uncontaminated happiness! Emmy Lou's future corruption was to become an outward one—the sightless, unknowingly vengeful cruelty of parents: betrayals from flesh-slinking men: kicks from the spurious, self-hating chastity of a world. Inwardly, she would al-

ways remain what she was on this July night—sentimentally fearless, indignant at shams, plaintively sighing, shadow-chasing. . . .

As she walked down Prairie Avenue now, her fears were minute and practical ones. It was now twenty minutes to eleven and she had, as usual, promised to return home not later than half-past ten. The hours between ten and twelve were always spooky, determining ones to her parents, for deep down within them these parents realized how often their own suppressed impulses had been sorely tempted by the bodice-loosening spell of impending midnight when they had been young. She would have to invent a plausible excuse for the tardiness—oh yes, she had stayed at Amy's house and Amy had insisted upon playing another game of ping-pong and they hadn't realized that the game would take so long. The implication of lying rested lightly upon her spirit and purpose, and was scarcely more than a necessary routine to her, like tying on her petticoat every morning. The desire to hide her legs from the sight of people whom she did not love was, in fact, much weaker than the one in which she protected her cherished, vitalizing experiences from the misunderstandings and officious interruptions of a father and mother. . . .

" 'Lo, Emmy—how are you?"

She turned and found that Ralph Klober, a neighbor, was walking beside her.

"Oh, hello—I'm all right"—her voice was constrained.

She had an aversion to Klober because she sensed

a sneaking lust in his eyes and because he had sometimes tried to impress her by boasting about the money he made and the gay times he had in distant cities—he was a drummer for a clothing-firm and went on the road for periods of two and three months. He was her idea of a "big mouth" utterly devoid of glamour and imagining that his pocketbook could rescue the commonness of his speech and tactics. Besides, when he looked at her she had the feeling that he would have loved to devour her but could not muster enough courage. Why, one Dickie-boy, with his ambition and pleadings, his shyness and distress, was worth all of the Ralph Klobers on earth, in spite of their money and their gra-and ta-alk! Klober was also a pest to her because he ignored her coldness—waiting around the hallway until she emerged on some errand and then accompanying her with the fiction that he was "going the same way." Again, he sought opportunities to brush against her at church-affairs and waylay her on the backstairs of the apartment house, but he did not dare to court her more openly, for in the world in which he also masqueraded, a girl of her age was not allowed to receive men, or go out with them. He wanted to pursue and attract her without "getting in bad" with her strict parents and without arousing the censure of his own family.

He was a man of twenty-eight, too lustful to be entirely shallow and too parrot-vain, thick-skinned, for anything resembling depth. His tragedy was that of the grubbing know-it-all, forced to primp himself before girls, poolroom-weasels, hotel-lobby loungers,

to deaden the knowledge that he was a spruced-up cipher at the mercy of actually powerful men in his business-world, who could dismiss him, smash him, with a grunt, scarcely aware of his existence. His tragedy was that of a little Napoleon caught in a grinding machine and begging for mercy underneath every amusing concoction of authority. Just shrewd enough to realize that he would remain a bluffing drummer for the rest of his life, and just sensitive enough to crave a palliative against the smallness brought by this knowledge, he solved the matter by inventing a lordship over women. If he could never become a prince of finance, never enjoy the thrill of bossing a drove of underlings, he could at least gain the status of a masterful trickster over the opposite sex. When a strumpet in a small town loaned herself to him, he felt like the devilish commander of all the rakes in the world and he left her on the next morning with a smile of gargantuan triumph as he remembered her love-words and the ways in which he had abused her. When he mixed with a fast woman from the fringe of Chicago's redlight district, he strove with all his might to bring her to a drunken stupor so that he could trot away without making the usual payment. When a marriage-angler fluttered around him, it delighted him to give her every encouragement and then, seizing upon some trifling pretext for anger, permanently snub her.

His weak spot was a secret respect for unassailable "purity" in the very sex over which he pretended to rule. Ultimately, he wanted to marry a shy, unmarked,

pretty girl under twenty—one who would first resist all of his maneuvers, and thus become an exclusive prize and convince him that he could rely upon her fidelity after the marriage. Her freshness, her ignorant worship of his firm position in the world, and the intensity of her married submission would lend a final, respectable ratification to the present, sly "kingship" which he could not confess in decent parlors. Then he could reform and apply himself to the sober business of lesser enjoyments with a wife and the raising of a family, and, of course, an occasional departure while he was selling on the road could still be a savory speck from the table of that other world which he had substantially forsaken. . . .

Yes, Ralph Klober, they gave you a swollen heart and no talents save those of the neglected, addled boaster, and yet you are not cruel, not even blameworthy. You need the lips and bosoms of women to give lies of power to your manhandled self-esteem and you were taught to regard sex as the ancient, unclean, slyly delectable repast, winking to you behind locked doors, and fustians, in a world where other invitations meant nothing to you but empty words. Flung into a primitive glade, you would have strode forth to capture your women with stone-hammer or sword: to revel in the bold enjoyment of superior muscles. Instead, they trapped the animal and gave it a touch of mind, the impotent grumble of a soul, and all the twinges of deviously working fear. O incomparable jest, known to so many millions of men and women! . . .

As he walked beside Emmy Lou now, Klober had a smile of cunning anticipation on his face. He felt that a stroke of luck had dropped her straight into his hands, and if she resisted their grasp, he intended to make an offer of marriage to her, since he had previously decided that she was exactly the kind of girl he wanted for a wife. He had been strolling in the park on that night, with a male friend, and they had stopped underneath an arclight behind The Refectory —a spot where unattended servant-girls could sometimes be approached after they emerged from the soda fountain. Turning around he had observed a boy and a girl walking from a dark nook of trees and bushes and hastily brushing off their clothes. The girl had halted for a moment to straighten her hair, while the boy wiped his face with a handkerchief and then used it to clean his shoes before he threw it away. Klober had turned to his friend and remarked: "There's a hot one, Tom! See that pair over there? See 'em? Well, I'd hate to tell you what *they've* been up to. Just caught them sneaking out of those trees only a few seconds ago." Then the couple had crossed the grass to a point farther down on the path where Klober was standing, and he had released a long-drawn whistle as he recognized Emmy Lou. Emmy Lou Filkins—no, it couldn't be her! Together with his friend, he had shadowed the couple until he was certain of his discovery, after which he had parted with the other man and hung around the corner of Fifty-fifth and Prairie, waiting for her to return home.

After a few seconds of small-talk now, he hooked

his arm into hers, boldly, and she drew away from him.

"See here, don't you get flip with me"—her voice was hard but had no anger in it.

"What's the trouble, Emmy—don't you like me?"

"I'm certainly not crazy about you."

"Well, you might be at that, if you'd give me a chance. Why don't you stop trotting around with mamma's-boys and take a ma-an . . . for a change?"

Silence.

"Oh, come on, Emmy, get down from that mare you're riding . . . come on now. I like your style and I'll promise to keep absolutely mum if you'll treat me right."

"Promise to keep mu-um? . . . What on earth are you talking about?"

They had reached the stone steps before the apartment-building in which they lived, and she halted, looked at him with a heart wherein fear barely stirred to scoff at its existence.

"Oh, you know what I mean."

"I do like fun."

Short silence.

"Anyways, I'm in a hurry now and you can tell me some other time."

She sped toward the front-entrance, convinced now that he was only acting wise to impress her, but he followed and caught her arm as she was mounting the hallway-steps.

"Look here, Emmy, I'm wild about you—honest Pete! I saw you sneaking out of the trees behind The

Refectory to-night, but I won't breathe a word to anybody. Sure not. All I want is for you to be friends with me, see?"

After the first swish of consternation, her mind worked rapidly. She must find out how much he knew!

"Suppose you *did* see me—what of it?"

"What of it, huh? Brushing your dress and pinning your hair up . . . I never thought you were tha-at kind of a girl."

Short silence.

"I still don't think you are, either. You just let one of those Frankel namby-pambs go a little too far with you, that's all."

Another short silence.

"Come on, Emmy, be decent to me. You'll find out I'm not a bad skate after you get to know me a little better. Why, say, I'm so gone on you I'd marry you in a second, 'spite of what I saw to-night."

He felt that the beginning of her response was guaranteed and that she had been cold to him in the past only because she had felt that he was a "gay dog" and had doubted the legitimacy of his designs on her. He looked at her small, straight-nosed face, with its haunting, quivering despondency of shadows, indistinct pinks, under the dim gaslight of the hallway, and the wisps of blonde hair welling around the forehead. A real tremor, not entirely lustful, shot through the pampered, grumpy dullness of his heart. Cherubs played the moonlight-sonata and dismissed furtive, picayunish dissipations. Frustrations turned to sugar

and were sprinkled on the way to a heaven of sentiment. Weariness of the small-time roisterer longed for the electricity in the mouth of this fresh girlish face.

Emmy Lou hung her head and felt unafraid but hemmed-in, with all of her thoughts moving in useless circles. Her first impulse to bribe him with coquetries became abortive when she realized that it would only postpone the calamity hovering over herself and her dear Dickie boy. Even if Klober didn't want her for keeps, he'd be satisfied with nothing less than a party with her . . . oh, she knew *him* only too well! . . . and . . . catch her giving him that!

He mistook her downcast appearance for one of yielding too ashamed to speak, and he kissed her cheek twice, with his hands stroking her neck, before she pushed him away. Anger crackled in her heart—thought he had her in a tight spot and could do what he pleased, didn't he? Well, she'd show *him* she was different from all of those village sweethearts he was always bragging like fury about!

"Oh, go ahead and te-ell—I don't care! I'm not going to be sweet to *you* just 'cause you've found out something!"

She hastened up the stairs and slammed the inner hallway-door behind her. Klober's thick lips were twisted back, as though a fist had struck them, and his brown, small-eyed face, under moist, black hair parted in the middle, abandoned the sentimental ache that had made it large with desire and returned to a wounded contraction. The puffed-up hussy—he'd

take her down several pegs before he was through, and it served him right for attempting to be friendly with such a snotty snip!

. . . . . .

The front-parlor of the Filkins apartment was neither depressive nor rapturous but cut into magnified "refinements" stolen from the corpse of aestheticism under an inaccurate microscope. . . . Smash the upright, walnut piano. Break the swivel piano-stool with four legs ending in glass balls. Take the bust of Shakespeare and the statuette of Rebecca At The Well, on the piano top, and dash them to the floor. Tear up the Axminster carpet woven into brown and green hexagons, suggestions of flowers. Crack the handpainted chinaware plaques on the mantelpiece, the window-curtains of crude, white net and lace tucked in near the bottom with pale blue ribbon tied in broad bows. Then stand amid the wreckage and pray for the deliverance of Emmy Lou, sitting in this parlor and hounded by the animate delusions and epilepsies which selected and assembled the inanimate array. . . .

Two days had passed since Emmy Lou's tilt with Klober in the hallway, and the hell of outraged respectability was in full blast. Klober had poured out the tale to his mother—taking care to mouth a noble apprehension for the welfare of the elder Filkins and a desire to prevent their wayward daughter from completely ruining herself—and Mrs. Klober had scurried down to the Filkins kitchen, on the following morning,

and retailed the revelation to Ethel, with many disavowals of malice, expressions of shocked sympathy, words of tender embellishment, and other dung-specks. By turns weeping and indignantly skeptical, Ethel had seesawed between visions of downfall almost too hideous to contemplate and hopes that the entire story might be a preposterous lie and end in the thrashing of the Klober son by her angry husband. Wrenching herself into an unreal composure, she had finally shooed the commiserating herald out of the kitchen, with a glued quivering of lips that silently shrieked: "You'll su-uffer for this, if it isn't true!"

When Emmy Lou returned that noon, the mother pounced on her with a tempest of questions. Emmy Lou, just back from warning her Dickie boy, and prepared for the fray, remained calmly, smilingly silent while Ethel stormed, cuffed her daughter's face, blubbered, and went into the tantrums of a scalded, outer heart performing an autopsy on the inner tepidities. Sharp pain was foreign to Ethel, but who can measure the infected degrees of pain below it? Who dares to be sure that even blunt knives will not penetrate the skin when the driving-force behind them is strong enough? Who can say that even smugness incarnate is free from the last grain of madness?

When an hour had expired and Emmy Lou still maintained her smiling, silent repose, Ethel began to fear that her daughter was on the verge of losing her reason, and then she changed to endearments, stroked Emmy Lou's hair—a little, buried breath of the vast mother-love which she imagined that she held. Emmy

Lou had clung to silence, smiles, because she was fortified in a dream-world to which the outcries of her mother meant little more than the baying of distant hounds. The other world, led by her parents, raved that it was wrong for a girl and boy to take each other and be happy—called this love immoral, filthy, brazen—but the other world had a comic-opera frenzy, with some of its inconsistencies dimly sensed through the pall of nearly eighteen years, and she could not take it seriously. Every healthy, warbling inch of her heart said that she was justified. Every leap of her blood carried on a reality that robbed the angry words, on the other side, of all their meaning. Every breath in her bosom told her that her love for Dick had been beautiful, clean, necessary, and though these adjectives were not in her head, the molten inkling of their direction warmed her heart, as she said to herself: "I was just bent on doing it, and it made me happy, and it couldn't have hurt anybody but Dickie and me, and *we* don't feel hurt, so. . . . Wish she wouldn't talk so loud. . . . Funny, when I *know* I'm in the right, I never feel the least need for yelling . . . I haven't hurt her ha-alf as much as she'll sa-ay I have—I've just hurt all the things she b'lieves in. . . . Oh well, 'sticks and stones can break my bones but names can never hurt me.' "

Emmy Lou was not inhumanly cold to her parents, even to the mother who failed so signally to command her heart. If she had slapped their faces, robbed their purses, derided them—hurt them in any way real to her—she would have yielded to weeping self-accusa-

tions, but she could not feel that she had harmed them, or even scorned them, to any appreciable extent. To her it was a battle between their raging notions and her own stolen enjoyment—an enjoyment that was proud and happy to itself—and the alleged heart-break of her mother became no more than a smarting officiousness. "Mother's just angry because she wants me to be what she is, but I certainly can't help it if I'm not!"

No one can take a romantic pagan down to her toes, even in her late teens, and drain one drop of the witches' potion out of her heart—the potion of softly bubbling sighs and stronger fermentations that rises to the taste of a great joy in her mouth. When a girl of Emmy Lou's age gives herself to an oversexed, fanciless, frightened craving, she can be coerced, if not altered. When she has struggled against her desires until the final overpowering, she can be temporarily restored to a feeling of tearful guilt. But when she builds a villa of dream-flowers and deathless, breathless defiances within a heart strong enough to hide them from every outside attack, she is immune to "conscience" and caviling. Then her very immaturity is her strength—a fumbling, inexperienced, but invincibly driven nakedness of purpose and the ability to sublimate fear until it becomes scarcely more than a film on the breath of bravery. . . .

Emmy Lou had remained silent for over an hour, moved by the proud stand that her contacts with Dick had been entirely her own business, and by the fear that she would subject him to dire maltreatment, if

she made a confession. However the hopelessness of concealment finally overwhelmed even her stubbornness, and she blurted out an admission with a coolness that staggered her mother. Ethel withdrew to her bedroom then and spent most of the afternoon tossing upon the quilts and mumbling laments. Emmy Lou sometimes sat on the side of the bed and strove to comfort her mother—soberly concerned but neither grief-stricken nor contrite—but Ethel only sat up on the bed then and drove her daughter from the room with rankling, sob-strewn accusations.

When Henry came back that night, the storm of profaned, evangelical envy broke out again. Ethel immediately called him into their room and as Emmy Lou sat in the adjoining parlor and heard the rumble of their voices behind the closed door, she could scarcely restrain herself from dashing out of the apartment, from walking, running, lurching until her legs refused to move, until human beings would be no longer near at hand, until her body could rest in the seclusion already attained by her heart. Cowardice at last?—yes, if cowardice can disdain its own tremors without fully dying. Selfishness?—yes, if selfishness can trade its skin for a disguise perfect enough to defy detection. Ignorance?—yes, if ignorance can be so unerringly mutinous that even "wisdom" must accord it a grave and musing respect. A plaintive indifference to everything swept over Emmy Lou. Even Dick became less than the shadow of a remembered babe. She had snuggled him to her breast for whitehot seconds but he had been in reality a babe born from the

deep hunger of fancies within her—a hunger so fecund that it longed for a second pain of cleavage one moment after the first one had transpired. She was always to be like that—always changing men to the image of her desire and then waking up to find that they had lost their godhead through no fault of her own or theirs. Each one was to remain indelible and still loved, but closeted and preserved beyond the need of future contacts—stowed away within the quieter part of her large and teeming heart. . . .

Some day men will learn that two kinds of women exist—the innate Magdalene, physically lazy and supine, and the mother-type, who gives herself to a succession of dream-children slipping from the prodigious, inarticulate hunger within her breast. These two women may seem to be identical: may commit the same external actions: may even dwell beneath the roof of the same brothel, but in reality they are as dissimilar as a prostrate log and a tree that bends underneath a processional of breezes! . . .

When Henry emerged from the bedroom, with Ethel, his fat face had the rigidity of metal, his thick lips were still and parted by a brutality which they had been unable to understand because part of it was too inherently contained within them. He had been deeply knifed, whereas Ethel had been only scratched and contused. His denied and celled fears had become agonizingly conscious of themselves and the reasons behind them, and he placed the entire blame for what had happened on his own shoulders. Yes, he had kicked his own lewd impulses in the face, when he

had been young, but they had still remained, flogged and heavy at the bottom of his heart—he knew that now—and they had taken their revenge by creeping into the birth of this helpless, darkly appealing, sinful daughter, Emmy Lou. And even in his own youth, they had not always been strangled . . . that night in the churchyard, with the wind making chilling rustles in the trees . . . frogs prophesying evil and woe, in the ditch near his feet . . . garter-snakes lending a swish to the grassblades . . . a village-boy, overborne by the tombstones and the night-hissings but frightened more by the pounding curiosity, the blazing weight of his heart. Beside him a spendthrift, fragrant, twinkly minx stands—a girl who even dares to giggle in this solemn, moon-weird place. . . .

Henry was filled with hatred for himself and poorly stifled pity for Emmy Lou, and the smaller, additional emotion—the pique caused by the knowledge that he would lose caste in his upright, social world when the story came out—was flattened to stray twinges between the battle of the first two feelings. When he stepped into the parlor, with Ethel slouching behind him and dabbing away her easy tears, Emmy Lou straightened up in her chair and sighed, not with fear but with weariness and concern propitiating each other in her breast. Why did she have to pass through it—the assailing words, the angrily prying questions, the shoulder-shakings? . . . No meaning to them. . . . Couldn't change what had happened . . . couldn't change her into the kind of girl her parents wanted her to be, though if they carried on too much she'd

feel very sorry for them and promise never, never to do it again . . . promises, always the exaction of empty promises. . . . But her father perturbed her nevertheless. She longed to pat the frown out of his hardened face: silence his wrathful mouth with a light, please-be-good kiss: tell him anything, oh any kind of a fib, if it would only make him calm again. In spite of his growlings, forbiddings, surveillances, she had always carried a sense of tender, poorly rewarded kinship with this man—a feeling that he understood her but did not dare to show it often because he was afraid that he would encourage both of them into committing the very actions which he raved against.

Henry stood motionless and looked at his daughter for a full half-minute, and then, to the vast surprise of both Emmy Lou and Ethel, he walked up to his daughter, lifted her up, and hugged her to his breast as he stroked her hair. Tears and a far-off gaze brought a dazedly uncomplaining sorrow to his eyes. Ethel advanced a querulous objection but he checked her with a sternness that she had never known him to manifest before. He ordered her to leave the room and let him talk alone to Emmy Lou, and she departed, feeling like a nonplussed outsider and scarcely knowing whether to assert herself or be sadly patient to this strangely lenient father: feeling also that she had never understood him and never would, but that it was far too late to remedy the matter.

Sitting beside his daughter, he drew from her the pathetic but boldly defended details of her love for Dick and the culminations in the park, and though

this boldness outraged him for a time—how could she be so lacking in the slightest sense of wrong-doing, in spite of the lust which he had transplanted within her?—the friction was once more superseded by compassion. Censure against her coolness wouldn't help matters now and she was probably only keeping up a brave front—a girl who thought that she deserved to be whipped but was determined not to whine, or shrink, at any cost. He must do his best to protect her from future transgression that could eventually ruin her life, but it would be unavailing and cruel to stamp upon her, to bullyrag her and drive every vestige of self-respect from her spirit, as blind Ethel had done without meaning to. The latter thought brought him a flitting morsel of comfort, since it removed a small part of the blame-load which he had forced himself to shoulder. Somehow, he would have to achieve a medium between harshness and monstrous encouragement, in his treatment of Emmy Lou now.

She had been heartened by his sparing affection and drawn out of herself to a point where she would almost have agreed to shun men forever—even her silly-nice Dickie—if he had demanded that, but when he spoke of forgiveness and began the old preamble to virtue and wholesome restraint, the mood of sacrificial closeness deserted her. She had a feeling that her father didn't mean what he was saying, that he had only memorized words to besmirch the things which he had once wanted, still wanted, deep within him. Her feeling was by no means as clear as the foregoing words, and it could only crystallize into the broken

sentence: "Father's always unhappy . . . he wants me to be too . . . then we can both sa-ay we're happy . . . like he does . . . funny . . . why?"

In addition, his emphasis on forgiveness struck a spark to enflame once more the heart which had been dulled almost to abdication by the softness of his first words. Here was the endless, obnoxious recommendation—kneel to be forgiven by God, or her parents, or anybody who failed to share her gladness and called it wrong and ugly! Kneeling . . . pretending to tear your heart out and let the other person's heart take its place!—the words were not hers but nevertheless they formed a horizon toward which her intuitions groped. Once more the old curtain fell squarely between her father and herself, but she nodded her head to his injunctions and appeals because she was tired and inwardly solitary now and she wanted to end the strain of listening to words from an unseen figure powerless to impress her.

Henry ensconced her, slowly and with trepidation, in the broken niche within his guilty heart, and he repaired to the kitchen and forbade his wife ever again to say anything that would "make the poor child believe that she was damned forever." After the nervous and largely silent supper, Henry decided to aim his guns in other directions. Having spared Emmy Lou and thus, indirectly, himself, his rage centered itself upon Klober and Dick. Klober had profaned the code of a gentleman by spying on Emmy Lou and then tattling to his family. The least that this dog could have done would have been to take the father

aside and quietly strive to enlighten him. This man had failed to show an inch of respect for a previously decent girl, in starting a tale that might make her name a by-word in the entire neighborhood, and extreme methods would have to be taken to close up his dirty mouth and those of his family. As for the boy in the case . . . contractions of red, huddling words to shapelessness . . . killing every faint lunge of reason . . . snatched up by the old, weather-beaten, ethical justifications, which are never more than spuriously thoughtful extenuations for the ancient goads of retribution, bitterly broken vanity, invasion of self-assigned property-rights.

Calmness and cruelty met in Henry's heart. This boy was a precocious, sex-mad reprobate, who had dared to drag an innocent, young girl into the bushes of a public park, as though she were a common strumpet. Even if Emmy Lou had encouraged the lad, through the fatal, inherited looseness in her heart, which she mistook for beautiful romance—how reluctantly Henry wrenched this admission from his heart!—even if she had, he should never have subjected her to the ignominy of such a spot, where any policeman, passerby, might have discovered her and pulled her into unspeakable disgrace! The thought was a burning dagger-point. Then a tremor of conscience interfered—the other, shadowy boy in the churchyard that night, what of him? . . . Stubborn, drony, confused excuses—he had discovered afterwards that he had not been the girl's first lover: the place had been secluded, immune to detection: the boy

had made his bitter payments in after years: the boy had been guileless, snared on by a girl heartless and darkly wise despite her nineteen years.

This was different—the member of a cheap, ice-cream-parlor gang of whippersnappers, maltreating a decent girl in the immediate vicinity of hundreds of people: subjecting her to the risk of terrible exposure: and probably laughing about it to his smutty chums on the very next day! Again, this boy was a Jew, belonging to a greedy, strutting, sharp-practicing race, who had beyond doubt wrung a special, boyish glee from seducing an innocent, lovely, Gentile girl. . . .

Who can trace the tortuous alchemy wherein base prejudices are changed to golden crusades? Who can analyze the seething conflict wherein struggles for kindness, fairness, become slain by apparitions but still imagine that they are animate factors? Who dares to measure the fear-blinded processes in which one man's expiation becomes another's unforgivable crime? . . .

That night, Henry stormed up to the Klober apartment and forced Ralph, his widowed mother, and his sister, to come downstairs, where they faced Emmy Lou in the Filkins front-parlor. Mrs. Klober, a fat, grayish black haired Teuton of fifty, with the beaming wariness of a professional gossipmonger on her podgy, blunt-nosed face, was frightened by the thought that she had made powerful enemies and run the risk of involving herself in scandalous recriminations. Your middle-strata purveyor and censor of other people's business always talks first and then cowers, or rants, according to the exact amount of aggressiveness shown

by the other person, and Mrs. Klober was no exception. Her daughter, a plump prude of twenty-six, unattractive and with the scared look of one flirting with spinsterhood, joined the mother in soothing declarations of respect, condonings of the terrible mistake poor Emmy Lou had made. They had expected the Filkins to be downcast, shakily grateful for the disclosure, and full of wretched pleadings for silence. Henry's belligerent attitude, shot through with contempt for the Klober son, took away their virtuously intrusive assurance and gave them a muddled fright, angry at itself but unable to disappear.

As he sat in the parlor and looked at Emmy Lou's repulsed, removed face, with its little, straight nose turned up and its blue eyes ripping him with their light, Ralph felt small and betrayed despite the sneer which he summoned to protect himself, and he longed to retract the entire story. . . . Oh yes, she *was* a conceited snip and an inborn hussy, but weren't most women the same, if a man gave them half a chance? The male sex had to watch its women eternally: eternally be prepared for treachery. Even a wild one like Emmy Lou would probably make a model wife to any husband who satisfied her and didn't slack the reins. Why in damnation hadn't he kept his trap shut and tried to win her with the decency of his silence, instead of acting like a disappointed Peeping-Tom when he was nothing of the kind? Twisting in the chair and chewing a cigar to strings, he asserted his love for Emmy Lou and begged to be allowed to marry her, feeling suddenly restored to the status of a purged

Sir Galahad as he made the offer. His mother and sister glared at him and could scarcely check the voicing of their gall—Ralph must be out of his mind to think of marrying, actually ma-arrying a girl of her kind!—but they were afraid to increase Henry's wrath. They bit their lips and then wanly dwelt upon the gallantry of their man. Ethel began a feebly worded assent to the proposal—clutching at anything that might save the hitherto spotless Filkins name from the contempt of their neighborhood, and hating herself as she clutched—but Henry interrupted her and coldly informed the Klobers that his daughter was far too good for them. Mrs. Klober struck back then—unable to control herself against what she deemed a preposterous insult—and even Ralph joined the chorus of pummeled vanities, but the tilt ended in a silent victory for Henry. The Klobers felt, secretly, that they had transgressed the dear, warm shibboleths of consideration, neighborly closeness, which served as the fundamentally rescuing professions of their lives, and this feeling slowly made their anger impotent. Naturally, a father was compelled to defend his daughter no matter what she was, and after all, they couldn't sidestep the fact that Henry Filkins was known to be a remarkably upright man in their community.

The sorry, strained confab terminated with their solemn promises never to say a word concerning Emmy Lou to anyone, and they filed out of the parlor with a confusion of resentments, dismays, and reliefs in their little hearts. . . .

O mystery of human hearts, millions of hearts

scarcely more than morasses sprinkled over with will-o'-the-wisps of kindness and joy . . . mystery of ineffable pettiness and amazing nobility dwelling side by side . . . mystery of spites and sacrifices so endlessly nagging each other. . . .

Emmy Lou had sat through the session with a proud removal sweetly unblemished to itself. These people, striving to cheapen her with their tongues, quarreling over her, blaming her—what did they matter to the unstained depths of her heart? She asked the question in her own colloquial words: "Why are they all fighting over me and telling me what to do—what business is it of theirs?" Even her father and mother became mere talking-machines releasing emotions a million leagues from hers, and therefore annoying because their words struck her ears with such an empty pretense of nearness. . . . When her father kissed her good-night, she felt a nerveless, limp twining of mild affection and illy censured distaste, and when Ethel embraced her and begged her "to be my good little girl again," Emmy Lou stifled a yawn behind her mother's back.

On the next morning, Henry's chafed moralities swung into militant action. First he telephoned the Rosenstein father and arranged to meet him that evening, and then he visited the police-captain of the district, who was a crony of his and one of the few church-going officers on the force. He was determined to crush the alien brat, who had jolted his entire heart and forced it into droopy circumlocutions, downcast self-inspections. Impulses of kindness toward this boy

did spring up, but they were almost instantly abjured by the outcries of a self-respect clamoring for more blood to avenge the blood upon its own slashes. . . .

And now, Emmy Lou was sitting once more in the parlor and waiting for her father to return from the Rosenstein home. She had passed through a day too pigeon-white, stalemated, to be melancholy, and too hopeless for tranquillity—confined to the apartment and forbidden to leave it except with her mother: forced to appear at the front-windows, in answer to the yoo-hoos of her school-chums, and tell them that she was too sick to go out: reading a dog-eared romance of the First American Revolution and longing to transport herself back to those pictured days. My, dashing soldiers in buff and leggings abducted their sweethearts then and fought off pursuing rivals and dared the fathers to cross swords with them. Imagine poor Dickie, arming himself with a pistol, breaking into the parlor, and carrying her away with a manlike oath of triumph—what an impossible jest it was merely to think of it! Gee, there were no coppers, and fast trains, and big jails in those times—that made it so much easier. Poor Dickie, he was probably turning white now as her father and his folks whacked him and called him names—how could people be so mean, so bossy, so, oh . . . not understanding anything except what *they* wanted. Even if Dickie wasn't afraid now, what chance did he have? They'd send him away to some reform-school, or punish him some other way, and he'd never be able to see her again. And she was just as powerless, except that she could and would

run away some day and be able to do exactly as she pleased . . . not just now, because they'd watch her like the dickens from now on and she didn't even have a dollar to fall back on . . . but some time . . . wait and see!

Would she keep in touch with Dickie and meet him long afterwards, and finally cling to him and tell other people to go hang themselves? The question met with falterings in her heart, surprising her at first and then bringing her another hard-won shade of that maturity which springs slowly from the pain of self-annihilation. She didn't have a true-blue love for Dickie, couldn't have it, because he was so far from being a self-reliant, pervasive man, who could order other people to do his bidding but had to fall down on his knees before his one and only sweetheart. Dickie had been a luring child to her, living in their world of boys and girls not quite so childlike, not quite the combination of funny spunks and knee-shakings that he was, and not quite as honest, fair-white, in their words. She had had a motherly urge to bend down to his cowering and longings for her—a deep, soft sublimation of sexual curiosity—but the feeling was warmly transient and it lacked that birth of mental respect, which must succeed physical revealment, if love is to remain. An imaginative girl can only continue to care for a man if he has an eloquent, iron spirit toward the world, and that of a nestling, unarmored child to her.

Dick receded now to the stature of an out-and-out, persecuted, stammering boy, arousing every shade of loyal pity within her but unable to bring forth the

fine, hushed, clear-eyed, worship from which permanent allegiance leaps.

Ethel entered the parlor and glanced nervously at the carved, wooden cuckoo-clock.

"My, it's nigh on te-en—I wonder why your father's so late?"—her gray eyes were sleepily self-immersed, unpained.

Silence.

"Did you hear what I said?"

"Yes, I heard you, mother."

Silence again.

"You might talk to me once in a while."

"I don't feel like talking, mother."

"Well, I hope you haven't got that terrible boy on your mind"—looking at her daughter, with an apprehensive sniff near to sniveling.

"Oh, you just want to quarrel with me, mother, but I'm not going to let you."

"I should say not—I think we've had enough quarreling for the past two days to last us a lifetime!"—Ethel dropped into the red-plush armchair and felt speechlessly maltreated and unhoping in front of this foolish daughter, whom she still loved despite everything but who had brought the family so much agitation and disgrace.

A minute later Henry came in. He looked tired and rubbed-out, and his blue eyes were tormented and yet grimly satisfied over the torment, in a face that had aged several years during the past forty-eight hours. After the first syllables of draggy greeting, he slumped down in a chair and stared down at his feet, as though

they had been to Hell and back again. Ethel spoke.

"Henry, you look all fagged out—what a nerve-racking day you must have had!"

"Well, I wouldn't want to go through it a second time, I'll tell you."

"What all happened Henry? I'm dying to know."

"I hate to talk about it, Ethel . . . but, of course . . . it's your right to know."

Short silence.

"I called that Rosenstein man up this morning. I was pretty curt—didn't want to say much over the phone, but I did let him know something mighty serious was in the wind."

"Yes, go on."

"Well, then I went down and saw Cap' Peters at the 47th Street Station and told him the whole story, and asked him what we ought to do."

"Yes—what did *he* say?"

"Plenty. . . . He was so all-fired mad he wanted to send a copper right over to the Rosenstein flat and nab the boy then and there, but we talked it over and then he said we'd better wait and see the father to-night. . . . Course, the papers don't want to print anything that would hurt a girl, but there's always a reporter hanging 'round the station and I didn't want to take any chances."

"That was certainly a wise move you made—why, if anything ever got in the papers about Emmy, I'd never get over it!"

"Oh, they wouldn't have run more'n a little stick on the last page—"

"Ye-es, and then e-everybody manages to find it just the same!"

"I know, Ethel."

A brief silence.

"And so-o . . . did you go up to the Rosensteins' to-night?"

"Yep . . . the Cap' went with me, and there was a nasty uproar for a while. I don't like to remember it. . . . The young scoundrel came to the door and I made a jump for him, but Pete held me back. His mother hustled him into a bedroom and kept him there till we left, and it was a good thing she did! . . . We spoke to the father and he wasn't half's bad's I thought he'd be. Of course, he had blood in his eye at first, but after we told him what his boy had done, he calmed down and started to talk turkey."

"I'll wager he was just gloating inside of himself —the mis'rable Jew!"

"Now, don't get any fancies into your head. He seemed to be just's broken up about it as we were, and we felt mighty sorry for him after a while."

Another short silence.

"What was the upshot, Henry?"

"He went in and had a talk with his son—guess he wanted to find out if the boy was owning up 'r not. Then he came out and we talked it over again. He agreed the boy ought to be shipped to a reform-school to take the rotten out of him. Otherwise he knew we'd all be in for ten kinds of Hell . . . he saw that well enough . . . but the *mother* came in and started to cry and then everything went blooey."

"Oh, she did? She ought to cry over that kind of a son!"

"Maybe so, maybe . . . but you can't blame a mother for taking up for her child. It's only natural."

"Oh, ye-es, I suppose so."

Silence again. Then Henry spoke with a palpable, wretched effort to make his voice inflexible—the climax to the scene in the Rosenstein home had pinched his jailed soul much more than his knifed and sermonizing heart would ever dare to admit.

"Yes, she cried and begged us to let the boy off, and when she saw we wouldn't budge, she flew up in the air and called us a couple of dirty bloodhounds—said we didn't have a right to put it all on her boy and Emmy Lou was as much to blame as he."

"Well, I like that! I wish I'd been there—I'd have told her enough to make her e-ears red!"

Henry sighed, and an undesired, saggy knowledge came to his fat face for a moment—a tincture of insight into the war between small, gashed egoes forever throwing useless invectives at each other or dodging behind the old screens of perfervid whiteness. The moment could not prolong itself—moral zeal, aided by an injured heart, took up the burden again, with a secret groan.

"Ye-es . . . you'd both have scratched your eyes out without doing a bit of good. I knew the woman was suffering—probably as much's I was—and I couldn't see any reason for losing my temper there. I asked her how *she'd* feel if some young rascal profaned her own daughter in a common public park . . .

dragged her in the bushes like a bale of hay . . . and I said it mighty quiet too."

"That's just what you should have asked! What did she say after tha-at?"

"Plenty. . . . Said I wasn't there to see who did the dragging, and her boy was just's good as Emmy and maybe better."

"We-ell, that's too much! I'd have tanned her face for that one!"

"Tanned nothing—that doesn't help matters, Ethel. Her own husband took her up on that one—said a boy had to be blamed because he was stronger and he knew more than a foolish girl did! She tried to answer him back but he went on raving and he said she'd coddled and spoiled the boy all her life."

"Good for him—he's got some sense, anyway. . . . Did she close up then?"

"Yep, she cried again and then she got quieter. . . . After a while, they both agreed to have the boy sent to a reform-school for the next two years. I told them it was either that, or have the case tried in court with a big hullabaloo about it. I certainly had no intention of letting that scamp get away without being punished!"

"And there's another side to it, Henry—if you hadn't taken such a firm stand, this terrible boy would have gotten the idea he could go on abusing decent girls without the sli-ightest difficulty."

"Yes, no doubt"—Henry rose from the chair, with a dull uncertainty on his face—the look of a man who had vindicated his emotions and ideas, and was

puzzled because he felt so little relief at the termination: because, somehow, he could not lift his chin back to its former highness.

He turned to his daughter, with concern erasing the dully muddled question of his face.

"You shouldn't have been listening to all this"—his voice had a quiver. "I'd never have let you, but I guess I was too tired to think much when I first came in."

A pause.

"The best thing you can do is to get this rascal out of your mind, once and for all. From now on we'll all have to agree *never* to mention the subject again."

Emmy Lou had been sitting in a stupor, in which the meanings of her parents' words came to her but could only saturate the tindery mood underneath the mood that waited for her to wake up. Something in her father's wearily authoritative words brought on the explosion. She jumped to her feet and stared at her parents, as though they were grewsome strangers.

"Don't you dare call Dick a rascal—he's a dear, sweet boy and you've all been piling on him just because you're mean . . . mean's can be-e and you don't know it. I've told you a hundred times—he only made love to me because *I* pulled him into it. . . . Oh, you're mean, me-ean. . . . I'll never be able to love either one of you again."

She hurried from the parlor while her parents stood and looked after her—petrified, angry, cut straight down to the center of their hearts.

SECOND SECTION

SECOND SECTION

A MONTH had passed since the night of bleached shields and cudgeled hearts in the Filkins parlor. Ethel and Henry had relented, skin-battered by the riddle of Emmy Lou's scorn, and instead of being locked up, Dick had been shipped off to an uncle in California. Before his departure, he had smuggled a letter to Emmy Lou, through Amy—a smudgy, beaten-down, wanly "loving" letter—and she had guessed that he was torn apart, vacillating, and had answered with a letter encouraging him but releasing him from their hope-to-die promises on the summer-crazed, absurdly dreamy bench in Washington Park (absurd only because it had been a childlike impossibility in the face of pertinacious ogres!). She didn't blame him for his hesitancy—blame of any kind was foreign to her rare heart unless it sprang from another person's deliberate attempt to injure, and while vanities, jealousies, still peeped out of her girlish spirit, they invariably bowed in the end to an opposite feeling of gentle immunity. This feeling, transposed into her own words, would have been: "Oh, I can get horribly angry at people, but it never lasts and I can't hate them . . . much. They can't help what they do—they were just born that way . . . like me."

She could be fierce when a person slapped her, or mauled someone dear to her, but it evaporated on the

next morning and was replaced by a blithe, or plaintive Oh-What's-The-U-Use? During the first day after she had received Dick's letter, she had rocked his memory to sleep with many a solicitous explanation, acceptance. Poor Dickie lad, how could anyone feel bad toward him, with his own parents wanting to lock him up: and grownup people banging him around just because he had dared to be happy with a girl during those nights in the park: and everybody threatening to hold down his whole life if he didn't agree to forget about her? . . . Poor, poor, Dickie lad, she would always remember him with a mingled kiss and sigh at odd moments, and wish desperately for his success, and be so glad and sorry all at once that she had hugged him, and hurt him without meaning to. . . .

Sentimental, adolescent excuses for fickle lust and selfishness?—no, ten times no! Even at nearly eighteen, Emmy Lou's selfishness was much smaller than those around her: intent upon making life a sheltered fairytale menaced by grownup giants but somehow staggering back to blisses and shimmerings after each reprimanding yell, misunderstanding. She glorified her idea of sexual freedom and sugared her emotions not to escape from looking at herself but because other people held up distorted, blackened mirrors to the powerful impulses within this self and forced her to fly to another extreme of gildings, softly altruistic defenses. Far from being born without a moral sense, she was destined to be conventionally scrupulous in all matters of conduct except those pertaining to sexual relations—there she was as guiltless and free to her-

self as a human bird flitting in and out among people with their feet pasted to the ground. There she was never strongly lustful, never witlessly servile, but filled with a wistful, unsoiled, untouched imagination, which made her moderate desires beautiful and unworldly to themselves, while they lasted. . . .

During the first few days after Emmy Lou's outburst against her parents, she had received harangues from the mother and a mortally pained silence from Henry, who had been unable to understand how his own daughter could assail him, monstrously deny her love for him, in spite of the heart-shrinkings within him that strove so feebly and erratically to tell him why. After all, flesh-and-blood ties should have surmounted any girlish anger that she might be nursing, any feeling that her parents had been overharsh and cruel in their desire to protect her, to save her life from decline and revilement. This child of his must be a cold-blooded perversion—a girl void of the warm, enormous gratitudes and loyalties that bound the members of a family together.

Silence between people can be terrifying and sundering, however, especially when it is real in one person and assumed in the other. Emmy Lou's unresponsive quietness, neither impudent nor forced, began to present itself as a specter to the father—an effortless accusation against him, which all of his moral and affectionate demands could not repel, try as they would. He veered around to caresses and gifts in the attempt to win back her trust and cuddling dependence, and he tried to bribe her with little concessions

which were sizable to him—letting her stay up till midnight: permitting her to attend a downtown theater, unaccompanied: assenting to her passion for poking around the back-yard and -porch, in dark blue bloomers and a white middy waist.

A species of compulsory compassion took Emmy Lou then, and she tried once more to revive the edge of her love for this father, who seemed to have two hands—one, downy and patting-fingered, and the other one showing talons when the glove slipped off. She failed, and yet covered up the failure to avoid striking his beclouded, hapless face. Ethel, on the other hand, made no overtures but was as dictatorial, waspy, as ever. Instincts told her that this daughter would not miraculously lapse into tameness and that further troubles were simmering, and, like a person backed against the wall, knowing that he is doomed to defeat, she tried to outdo herself in vigilance and arbitrary words. Sputters of words rose up to drive out the heart-wilting knowledge—rose, and failed, and rattled out again. To Emmy Lou, her mother had almost ceased to exist, and the dying twinges of her affection were rapidly subsiding to a practical attitude in which she was bent on circumventing an ill-tempered task-mistress who persisted in treating her as a culprit doing penance.

Three days after the "scandal" had blown over, the Filkins decided to send Emmy Lou to an aunt, Sarah Hiers, who ran a summer boarding-resort in South Haven, Michigan. The Klobers had fearsomely kept their promise, and the neighborhood seemed to know

nothing of their daughter's "downfall," but tongues might nevertheless be wagging covertly. They had the squirmy sensation of standing on a powder-mazagine and they felt that tranquillity would have a better chance if they removed Emmy Lou from the scene.

And now, a month after the bitter night in the parlor, Emmy Lou was sweeping the front porch of her aunt's house, and hating to move in the hot, friendly late August afternoon, and singing a school-song, in a low voice, because the meaningless words and melody distracted the aversion and wafted away the clouds of dust that flew from her broom. "By thy prairies verdant waving, Illinois, Illinois. By thy streams so purely laving, Illinois . . . Illinois. . . ."

The afternoon was glaring, perfume-wrapped, unmoving, with a sturdy, northern presage, pained and yet ever so drowsily delighted by a tropical insinuation. The tweet-tweet of birds and the chirping of insects sounded against an almost inaudible humming which filled the air—Nature's toy-orchestra, neither poetic nor prosaic: playing its few notes in the search for food and mating; mercifully and superbly unaware of significant human complexities.

People were playing croquet on the closely clipped lawn, shaded by elms and ashes, while children threw beanbags and hopped in the inevitable: "a tisket, a tasket, a green and yellow basket. . . . I sent a letter to my love and on the way I lost it. . . . I lost it once, I lost it twice, I lost it three times o-ove-er." The treble voices of the children, and the lower ones of their elders, strummed the air with a humdrum enjoy-

ment too purposeless to be kind, too heedless to be cruel. The large, wooden house in navy-blue and white had two stories and a garret, with a gabled, black-shingled roof and a flat-topped front porch with mosquito-netting around it. The house had the aspect of Blue-Beard's head, with his body buried in the ground for retribution, and if it is true that houses take on the main essence of their occupants, the aspect may have been more than a fancy plus suggestions of lines.

A quarter-mile behind the house, the lake purred below high bluffs, and the distant cries of bathers could barely be heard. Emmy Lou wiped a smudge from her nose, with the corner of her gingham apron, and looked up at a Baltimore oriole perched on the lowest branch of a tree beside the house. "Nice oriole . . . do as he darn please . . . dozens of worms in his tummy, the fat little ruffian . . . couldn't chop off that chicken's head last night . . . can't kill . . . could if I was stepped on. . . . Now E-emmy-y . . . too hot to li-ive . . . will he touch me to-night? . . . pepper and rosebuds . . . funny combination . . . 'singing in the moonlight, that all I . . .' what else is there to live for? . . . paregoric and rosebuds. . . . Oh, shut-up—you're too fu-unny. . . ."

Sarah Hiers came out on the porch. Gaunt woman, who put a taunt on your face? Who gave you practical antidotes against a poison administered in your youth—a poison of jilted lust and wilted nosegays? What left your eyes as void of real sentiment as grease-specks, while still compelling your voice to clang out a summons to the absent feelings? What

turned your twisted nose and thick lips to scoffings, and made you a scavenging busybody at other people's feasts, and brought you a middle-age as grayly lusterless as the strands skeining the brown hair on your head?

"Dora wants you in the kitchen."

"What does she want no-ow?"

"Taters need peeling and we ought to whip some cream for the cherry pudding."

"But, Aunt Sarah, I wanted to go in bathing this afternoon. Can't she wait'n hour? It's only three."

Sarah looked aggrieved, with eyes that studied her niece.

"Dear me, if you don't wa-ant to help your own cousin I can't make you, but it seems to me you'd be glad to help once 'n a while, seeing's how we don't ask you to pay for your board, Emmy."

Emmy Lou felt resentful but she could not cope with this imputation against her generosity, and she went back to the smoky, messy kitchen, with a mumble and scuffle in her heart. Canny Sarah had refused to accept Henry's persistent offer of weekly payments for his daughter's stay, because she needed an extra worker in the house and foresaw that she could use her niece to good advantage, with the twin calls of affectionate assistance and nonpayment ever at hand. Yet, Sarah was no human approach to a preposterous character from Dickens—a proudly penny-pinching, self-aware, villainous creature at the bazaar. She was a sterling altruist to herself, and she could indeed be selfishly considerate, sympathetic, to her own son and daughter,

but the intensely imagined altruism ended at this point. All other people were just so much profit and loss to her, and she preyed on them in venal ways with every variety of venial explanation and . . . with rare thuds of literally forced-out generosity.

Ethel had confided to her sister the news of Emmy Lou's misstep—reluctantly, tearfully, and only because she had felt that the revelation would not pass on and she wanted Sarah "to keep a close watch on the child." 'She didn't trust those good-looking summer boarders—popinjays taking advantage of the moonlight and the silly credulity in a girl's heart!—and the good Lord knew, her poor daughter was not only wild but even saucy about it. Oh, the streak was horrible, inexplicable, but it simply couldn't be innate in a child from her own flesh and bone, with a father who walked the chalkline with such an utter sincerity, in spite of the occasional vulgarities which he thought were so humorous. No, no, it could be ripped out of her, and the child would eventually settle down to a happy marriage, but all of those near and dear to her would have to adopt stern and sharp-eyed measures until the girl was well over twenty. She was practically eighteen now—staidness would begin to show itself in her if she could only be safely conducted through the remainder of this torturing year!'

Sarah had listened with sympathy above and an unconscious delight below—poor, poor Ethel . . . such a bolt out of a clear sky when Henry had his store on its feet and everything had been going so well, but—words unformed in the conscious mind—'so-o, Emmy

Lou's practically a juvenile deli-inquent, and Henry always turning up his nose at my dear, sweet Dora and saying she was backward, no life to her! I hope he's satisfied with his precious, fo-orwa-ard gad-about now! My Dora may not be so lively and quinsy-like but she's a sober, big-hearted, wholesome girl, bless her heart. Worth ten Emmy Lous in a parcel! . . . I do pity poor Ethel, though she's always looked down on country-folks since she went to live in that hightoned Hyde Park! . . . Well, well, an out 'n' out hussy and only nigh on eighteen—came from the fa-ather's side all right. . . . She needs to have the flightiness dri-iven out of her, and I'm the person who can do it. Bet she never lifts a hand in that city apartment. I'll give her some good, honest, hefty work and when she's through with it she won't feel so much like bouncing around with the men. If I let Henry pay for her, she'd just loll in the hammock here all day, like a grand lady, and probably flirt with every male on the premises! . . . Course, I'm sorry for the poor child, that goes without saying, but there wouldn't be no sense to showing it now—she's been spoiled enough, lord knows! . . . She ma-ay not be bad way down in her heart—couldn't be, with half of o-our blood in her. . . . Just needs plenty of chores to keep her busy, and a good old-fashioned raw-hiding when she gets too frisky. They only get into mischief when they're idle! . . . That's why I always dread the long winters here for my Dora girl. Nothing much to do then, and all those dratted barn-dances with that applejack aflowing!' . . .

The Hiers' summer-kitchen was a shed attached to the rear of the house and unoccupied during the winter. A large, black iron, wood-burning stove: rough, wooden walls and floor: pots, pans, oilcloth table-covers—realism was hard, disheveled, and cozily moist in this kitchen, like a prose confession scarcely awake: a tired child stuffing himself without gluttony: a bristly bumpkin fretting over his stews more from force of habit than desire.

Emmy Lou sat, peeling potatoes and talking to Dora. Dora was a spindly, freckled, aggressive girl, with brown hair pinned to a braided bag at the back of her head, and the long-nosed, gray-eyed face of a human magpie turning repression into scores of relieving words.

"There's a dance down at Fosdick's Hall to-night—too bad you can't go, Em'."

"I'll go, if I want to."

"Not if ma knows it—Aunt Ethel told her to keep a sharp eye on you."

"Aw, fiddlesticks."

Short silence.

"Wonder what you did that makes 'em all so fuzzy 'bout you?"

"Keep . . . on . . . wondering."

"Now, Emmy, you don't need to be snappy with me. I think it's a shame the way you can't have any fun."

"Don't you worry, Dor'—I'm going to trot out some day and make up for lost time. You wait and see."

"I hope you do, Em'—all those kill-joys want us to do is work, wo-ork, wo-o-ork."

Dora was a coward who bowed to her mother and brother, and relieved herself with defiant words behind their backs. She spoke again, after a silence: "They're going to have some coons doing the bunnyhug down at Fosdick's to-night. I'm crazy 'bout going, but ma won't let me keep company with a-anyone except that backnumber Harry Ames. He can't two-step worth a cent, and he's always sucking his teeth—gives me the creeps."

"Why's she so set on him?"

"Oh, he's got a hundred acres a mile down the road and he's just bulging with bills. She knows he's gone on me, and she wants me to marry him."

"Say, what are we anyway, Dora—a sack of flour in a ra-affle?"

"Does look that way sometimes. . . . Oh, well, they love us, course . . . and they only want us to do the right thing, but . . ."

"Right thing nothing! They'd tie our feet together if they could have their way. Look at all the girls bathing down at the beach now, and we've got to stay in this hot, old kitchen. Aunt Sarah wouldn't even give me an hour off when I asked her."

"Oh, ma means well enough, but she can't see anything in the summertime 'cept making money. We don't do a thing in the cold spell, you know—just sit around and crochet and read the papers and do a few chores."

"Well, I can't see why I should suffer for that reason."

Short silence.

"Oh, maybe ma will let you go to the dance to-night with brother Tom. She knows you're safe enough with him."

"I've got nothing against cousin Tommy, not a thing, but he ditched me last time, the minute we got there, and then I had to sit around all night and look foolish!"

"Sure, he's sweet on Mamie Jenkins and he stuck to he-er all the time—ma always goes into reg'lar conni-iptions if she finds out he's been sparking with Mamie, 'cause Mame's supposed to be a devil with the men."

A long silence came, broken by Dora. . . ."I'll bet you'd be just crazy to go with that handsome boarder . . . you know, Ben Hervey. I saw you talking with him behind the barn last night—oh, didn't I though."

"Well, keep it to yourself, ple-ease."

"Sure thing. . . . Are you daffy on him?"

"I don't know. . . . He talks awf-lly nice and he knows so much about the world. . . . Susie tells me he dances like a dre-eam."

"He certainly does! I danced with him last summer and I didn't even know I was on the floo-or."

"That's not why *I* like him. . . . A girl can't dance with a chap a-all the time, Dor'. . . . I'm just tired of silly-nilly boys who don't know a thing about life—I want a ma-an clean down to his toes!"

"I know, but they can get a girl into heaps of

trouble, Em'. They never care 'bout what happens to he-er."

"Oh, bother tha-at. Even trouble's better than folding your hands all the time, 'r going with somebody you don't care a snap of the fingers about!"

Dora looked at Emmy Lou with pique and envy still-born in the stare of her eyes. Although she was almost three years older than her cousin, she regarded Emmy Lou as an amazingly grownup, devilish city-girl who had barely dipped into the flesh-pots which were so sternly forbidden and yet so invincibly lurking in the Hiers' home. She felt irritated at her countryish lack of "wiseness" and yet glad that she could at least hug her scant measure of freedom, while her cousin was more of a culprit locked in the pen, but beneath these two reactions her relatively undreaming heart held germs of hatred and respect for Emmy Lou—never-crystallized stirrings. Oh, Emmy Lou would suffer some day, just see if she wouldn't, and it would serve her right too—why should *she* be able to go too far when other girls couldn't, or didn't dare? But still, she *was* a brave peach just the same and you just had to like the snotty way in which she defied all the grownups around her. . . .

Tom Hiers came into the kitchen—a youth of twenty-three, with inert melancholies on his tanned, thin-lipped face. The black eyes below his tangle of black hair looked at life with a spellbound voracity—lust and its own distrust hypnotized by the monotone of farm-drudgery and the sludge of outside hypocrisy. In spring and summer he had to wrest underhanded

tidbits from a life of excessive toil. In late autumn and winter he stretched himself gratefully: arranged half-genuine "business-trips" to Chicago: and gallivanted with the girls in his neighborhood, in a covert way, to appease his doting but church-pure mother. He did not covet Emmy Lou—their close relationship would have made such a feeling a mortal sin to him—and he regarded her only as a jade too artful for her years and sassy-kittenish in ways that needed masculine quelling.

He joshed around with her in the kitchen—his face never losing its loose-jawed melancholy as he did—and she answered in the same vein, to assuage the heat and her scrapy tasks. To her, he was just a bearish hulk, neither friendly nor unfriendly, but a symbol of naggy, outside man. . . .

That night she met Ben Hervey, behind the lopsided, russet barn where she, Dora, and some of the less choicy summer-boarders slept. Sarah had forbidden her to go to the dance, on the ground that she ought to be up early on the next morning to help with the baking, and she was still wearing her long, gray-checked, spotty house-dress and feeling mortified about it. If she had changed dresses, her aunt might have had a glimpse from the kitchen and become suspicious. Ben would think that she was a frump, and she couldn't explain matters to him. Besides, it was unfair that she had to compete with the summer-girls in front, with their frilly duds and their willy-nilly freedom. Would she ever be able to do as she pleased?—the old battle-lament, growing more irksome with each passing

day. Well, another two weeks and then she'd be going back home—wait and see what happened then! She'd never on any account go back to her last year at High unless she was allowed to go out with anyone she liked and come back at eleven, even twelve, and since there wasn't a tinker's chance of receiving such a divine permission, she'd run away from home in a twinkling. . . . Half loved her father: just couldn't love her mother no matter how much she tried: just wouldn't be roped down and barked at all the time—wasn't in her blood, and if that made her a bad girl, as they all said it did, then she'd have to bear up under her doom and leave *their* world forever . . . frightened just a little by the sheer, lonely bravado of this last assertion but hanging to it nevertheless. Being good, to most people—far as she could see—was just tying yourself down and finally getting to like it so much that you hated to see other people running around loose! . . .

She sat on camp-stools with Hervey, behind a thick grove of oak saplings, and talked to him, and prayed that they might not be discovered by some of the children always playing near the barn. Twilight was beginning to sprawl over the scene, and the last reds, purples, and salmons of a sunset, far out over the lake, were bathing the sky in that inimitable, untrammelled, wanton-pure fusion of peace and ecstatically relinquished curiosity so unknown to human beings. A corn-field, a few rods away from Emmy Lou's trysting-spot, made a glimmer of tessellated green and rustled in a meditation too fine and basically unperturbed

for human ears to separate, or understand, its syllables. A huckleberry-patch near her feet exhaled a musky odor, and a profusion of buttercups and early goldenrods bobbed an interminable yes to each beat of Emmy Lou's heart. They were rooted, and yet free from impediment and censure within their modest domain, while she had to sneak away for stolen words with a man and glance apprehensively over her shoulder every minute. Yet, human hands invaded their lives too: tore them up and killed them . . . just a fight to see who was stronger, what thing could pull up the other thing and use it and throw it away. . . . These thoughts came to her far too dimly for even a stumble of words, as she watched the nodding flowers.

Hervey was a natty, medium-height man of thirty, and on this evening he was resplendent in white duck trousers narrowing to high cuffs: white canvas shoes: a pink silk shirt: and a high, stiffly white collar from which an emerald cravat fell. His stiff, yellow straw-hat, with a black band around it, reposed carefully on a handkerchief spread out on the ground, and sometimes he stooped and anxiously brushed off an insect from this diadem of masculine affluence. He wrote popular songs and lyrics for a publishing-firm in the Chicago Loop, and while he had achieved no remarkable success in this field, he earned enough to gratify the tastes of a coxcomb and night-life gamboleer. He regarded himself as a poet and composer par excellence, whose stuff so far had been a bit too high-grade for widespread, thunderous approval, and he felt that he would some day throw off "some mighty serious

poetry," if he could put over a series of big smashes in his present game and escape from the grind of earning his daily bread with "your kiss, my de-ear, is bliss, my de-ear, ta-ra-ta-tum-ta-tee." He had a thin talent for tunes that were reminiscent of the popular successes of his day but just different enough to make him an accepted, moderately paid camp-follower in the song-writing field, with a dash of the cakewalky ragtime that was creeping into popular music then. Ecstasy and originality were faint enough within him, but he was a mildly clever parrot within a limited realm and wise enough to respect a crude version of these qualities and feel that he might attain them some day.

He was Emmy Lou's idea of an artist superb and a knowing man of the world, and though his splurgy conceits jarred on her at times, she excused them on the ground that he was a courted adventurer in the outside world, to which she longed to escape, and must be expected to feel blown-up about it. The excuse met with opposition within her—why couldn't real big men talk small and let a girl find out herself how big they were?—but her mingled ignorance and inquisitiveness could not quite resist the lure of a self-assured cavalier from the land of applauded entertainment, fizzy night-resorts. She had no actual warmth of feeling for Hervey, but he sang to all of her curiosities and dazzled her sense of belabored obscurity, and was proficient in an earthly-sweet, romantically tinkling "art," which the surfaces of her heart could understand. Hervey electrified her, physically—on the outside—without piercing the real longings to which he was

such an engaging and half-sensed counterfeit. What a contrast he was to her poor Dickie Boy, who was such an adorable, easily fussed, know-it-all greenie without the least idea of life and the teeming, shadowy people beyond the horizon (not precisely her words, but their counterparts). Poor Dickie, slapped down because he'd been bold with her—he *was* better than Ben, deep down in him, but Ben had arrived and just reeked with victory, whereas Dickie was just a beginning struggler, like she was. . . .

They had chattered about quirks and foibles in the boarders at the place and, after a silence, Hervey crooned the opening bars of a song: "I don't know why I love you, but I do-o, I doo-o, I doo-oo. I can't see why you hold me, but it's tru-ue, it's tru-u-ue, it's tru-u-ue" (they found the financial patent around 1900 and they've been pounding it ever since).

"My-y, that's a peach of a tune"—her eyes were half-closed and starry.

"Glad you like it, Em'. Maybe I had you in mind when I wrote it—never can tell!"

"Oh, yes? Well, if you had, then you wouldn't say maybe."

"Maybe."

"Aren't you sma-art?"

His brown eyes tried to be snugly retiring and courted above a stubby nose and puffed-out lips.

"You're a great little teaser, Emmy."

"Well, you're no slouch yourself."

Short silence.

"How d'you know I'm not in love with you . . . pinky-face?"

"Don't tell me—you're always making up to Mary Crisswell, that hoity-toity one with the rhinestone rings."

"Oh, bosh, Mary's a good enough skate, but I'm not really gone on her. . . . She's *always* talking about her deeah papa-a, who owns the Crisswell hardware concern, I'll have you know, and all her so-ocial advantages. Social ra-ats!—Mrs. Van Doren Wentworth doesn't know Mary's alive."

Hervey had been setting his cap for Mary but she had rebuffed him up-to-date, and it was an ointment to his pride to jeer at the girl whom he secretly craved and respected. He liked Emmy Lou's tender-teasing manners, with an obvious fascination for him shining beneath them, but otherwise she was merely a physically appealing, unusually forward kitchen-slavey to him. She was determined to have her romantic fling, and why shouldn't he accommodate her? These summer spooning-matches were recognized lies, which most men and girls indulged in and then trotted back to the sober city-business of autumn. Of course, it would be a shame to hurt her if she was really innocent, but something in her unshrinking poise, so rare for a girl almost eighteen, made him divine that he would not be the first man in her physical experience. He divined also that she had a bravery which would keep her from whining afterwards and thus diminish the chances of troublesome dramatic scenes.

She answered his sneers at Mary with an open ques-

tion, since prolonged parryings wearied her impatient spirit.

"Well, you've been chasing her just the same, and I'm not going to play seconds to anybody. You can decide between us right now, Mister Be-en, and you'd better tell me the truth too, 'cause I hate fibs worse than poison—big fibs anyway."

Her straightness took him aback, and as he looked more closely at her, an actual wavering surprised his heart and resisted his practiced efforts to laugh it down. The combination of dusk and trees—glamorous because they made him feel less like a fraud to himself—and the warm quiver of plants and flowers near him, and this girl, with her straggling blonde hair, candidly glistening face, began to play havoc with his stunted deliberations. No man save the coarsest can remain his hope of a conscious Don Juan when both the setting and the girl strive to sweep away his daytime vanities, and dissolve to a primal music strong enough to reach the ears of the bottom needs within him. In such a case, he actually persuades himself that his emotional quest has ended and that the girl beside him holds a permanent, exclusive, breath-tightening haven, which he has never discovered before and which he never intends to leave. A night-molded witchery, abetted by a confined sentimentality—which he was wont to sneer at only because he was afraid that it would make a fool of him—welled up in his heart and drove out the gnat-stinging worldly-wisdoms, the fetching and retchings caught from the throes of street-level life. After all, why shouldn't he stick to

this ravishing, just-blooming girl and even marry her in a pinch—she was a lovely, unspoiled, honest beaut', and her freshness would take all the sores out of him (the sores of money-prodded dissipations), and she'd give him the fine, unquestioning, unpurchasable adulation which every man needed, to keep his backbone steady.

On the next morning, he was to return to his definition of reason, and feel the idle, stale inflations of a man who had added another girl to his semi-imagined string without bending to her emotions. On the next morning, he would realize that he wanted to marry wealth and social position, to give him the leisure in which he could demonstrate his "artistic intentions" (laughable in actuality, but real and burning to his sordidly trapped conceits). Then he would continue his plans to seduce Mary Crisswell and utilize the impetus of her subsequent fright to induce her to marry him. Then he would become small and cool, bound to a world of civilized indecencies in crêpe de chine, but now he could see nothing but the slim, heart-bare girl beside him: feel nothing but the surge of insanely odorous, sky-lowering, disrobing night that made his body a puny instrument in its hands.

"I love you, Emmy . . . really 'n' truly."

"Like fun you do."

"I do, I tell you. I'm not fooling now."

"Are too."

"Oh, hell . . . excuse me, Emmy . . . didn't mean to say that."

"Go ahead and swear . . . I'm not a baby."

Short silence.

"Listen here, Emmy . . . I've said the same thing to plenty of girls and I've been a pretty low rotter, I guess . . . but I mean it this time!"

"You do not."

"I do, Emmy . . . honest to God I do!"

The broken, clumsy nudeness in his voice overpowered her intuitive distrust for him and gave him the poignantly self-betraying guise of a "brilliant" man and an unskillful schoolboy joining hands in the approving wizardry of the dusk, which had almost sifted into night now.

"Be-en, you make me sorta dizzy when you talk like that"—she leaned forward and he kissed her, while a clean riot in his heart threw out the dirt and nuisances of corrupted sensuality.

A few minutes later they were walking into the cornfield, with her head snuggling against his shoulder, while the century-old Pied Piper, so inextricably loved and blasphemed by men, danced on ahead and played his eerily dulcet, exorcising tunes. . . .

Throughout the next day she hustled through her chores and delighted Sarah, who felt that her niece was becoming more tractable and might yet be salvaged for a respectable future. Dora, on the other hand, squinted at her cousin's briskness, frisky hummings, and "wondered what was up"—ninety-two in the shade and Emmy Lou acting like a colt let out in the pasture! Bet anything she was meeting that Hervey man on the sly—the horrid little dare-devil! "I'll tell ma on her, if she is—aw, shucks, that would be a low thing

to do. Why shouldn't Emmy have some pleasure?—we work like coons in this kitchen all day long. Still, why should she be able to spoon to her heart's content when I don't da-are to let him do anything except kiss me goodnight after the dance? Well, it's not her fault that I'm afraid and she's not." The conflict went on—annoyed drudge and admiring serf, each unable to down the other. She tried to "pump" Emmy Lou about Hervey, but Emmy Lou, with the prescience of a wild-gentle thing snuffing at a hundred, quilted-over pits, threw girlish squibs at Hervey with such a seeming lack of interest that her cousin became disarmed.

That night Emmy Lou donned an old-rose dress with trailing sleeves and horizontal ruffles extending from the waist to the feet, and sat on the front porch, apart from the boarders. She'd show her beau that she wasn't a pauper and give him a chance to compare her with that nose-up Crisswell girl and her trunkful of glad rags. So far, he had only seen her in dowdy old fling-ons, and it wasn't fair. She did indeed look old-young, and decorously fresh, and wistfully sparkling, as she waved the round, palmetto fan in front of her heat-flushed, little face. Hervey, who was squatting with a group of boarders in an opposite corner of the porch, continually turned around to glance at her, with a tugging aftermath of the previous evening's thralldom still in his heart. Boy, she certainly did look like a million plunks when she was spruced up in her best, and she did have all the fine airs of a grownup lady, despite her youth—it came natural to rare ones among her sex! . . . Oh, hell, why was he surrounded by so

many temptations in the form of women equally as good-looking as Emmy Lou—women who could hand him the material couches and trappings which he had to fight so hard for now? He really wanted this strange, open-hearted, headstrong girl, who could look him straight in the eyes at this very moment, as though he had never touched her—a new kind of girl to him, for in his experience, girls who were not wise and indelibly "fast" always hung their heads afterwards, or tried to be nervously distant, or were filled with over-spilling fears and tears. Yes, he wanted her like sin, and yet he couldn't stick to her—it was a practical impossibility. Her glamour would disappear sooner or later and then he would wake up to find himself tied down to an unstirring wife and the grind of supporting her. Ugh—snap out of it, Ben. You've got your future to think of, and it won't be anything but a summer-romance to her.

He had strolled with Mary that afternoon and, for the first time, she had allowed him to hug and kiss her —deserting the "blasé," grand-mannered stiffness with which she had striven to test and inflame his desire. He was "tremendously attractive" to her, physically, and she looked up to him as a talented, minor celebrity, who could rise to heights of fame with the aid of her invaluable brains and social charm. She was a virgin of twenty-five beginning to chafe at the dullness of her condition, and yet had not married because the men who had proposed to her had been either homely or void of the qualities which she considered to be distinctive accomplishments. In her own opinion, she

was a marvel of wit, lazily stifled abilities, and feminine enticement, and she wanted a man who would be worthy of the furbished, non-assertive graces within her. She tinkered with the piano and vocalizing and she had dreams now of appearing at exclusive functions, with Ben as her husband, while she played and sang his ballads to envious listeners shaken out of their aristocratic nonchalance. . . .

Yes, even the most dreamless creatures tremble now and then beneath barely heard, misinterpreted echoes of your distant footsteps, Art! . . .

Mary had exchanged no definite promises with Ben that afternoon, but she had coyly assured him that "he had turned her head more than any other man in her past," and he had agreed to stroll off with her on the present night, preferring to wait for the enchantments of moonlight and a more lonely road before he made final overtures.

She came out on the porch now, fresh from an hour of hopeful primping in her room, and nodded to Emmy Lou as she walked gayly to the corner where Hervey sat. To her, Emmy Lou was little more than a snippy, bean-pole child, definitely looked down upon as one of the servants and noticed only because at times she talked back to her elders and showed an irritating lack of proper upbringing.

Mary was a stout woman, never quite at ease in the whalebone corset with which she gambled for the wasp-waist then in fashion. She had a bundle of coarse, red hair pinned in rising puffs and a round, pale, flat-nosed face, which she protected zealously with para-

sols to keep it from acquiring a plebeian tan. . . . Emmy Lou winced as Mary sat beside Hervey in the hammock and fluttered her eyes admiringly at him as she spoke her share of the rapid-fire small-talk, which she thought was so unbearably witty. Snatches of the dialogues reached Emmy Lou: "Oh, skeda-adle—she isn't 'n apple-dumpling. . . . No? Did you ever see her in a bathing-suit? . . . Nope, I never saw the elephant at Lincoln Park either, but I'm a good guesser. . . . Oh, tighten up your belt—you're a beanbag yourself. . . . Love's an itching sensation in the heart but you can't scratch it. . . . Sure I can—my heart's pinned to my sleeve. . . . Yes, I know—it's a safety pin. . . . I nearly di-ied when I met them a year later and they were calling themselves Mr. and Mrs. Rose! Rosenthal just couldn't stay because all his business was with Gentiles. . . . Su-ure, a rose by any other name would never be a rose! . . . She tried to swim to-day and she nearly drowned her poor husband. . . . Yep, first time in his li-ife he ever swallowed water! . . . Oh, go on, I know what *you* go down to South Haven for!" . . .

Emmy Lou sniffed to herself—maybe she had been born without a sense of humor but she'd be darned if she could see why they all laughed at these remarks. To give Ben credit, he never joined the laughter but only smiled now and then, as though he felt compelled to. Of course, he didn't dare to notice her here, but she would have respected him more if he had walked up to her now and taken her in his arms, with a gesture telling the world outside and the little, gabby world on

the porch to go to the devil if they didn't like what he was doing. She missed her stripped, opalescent, impatient idea of romance, wherein men and women dashed into each other's arms and defied everybody to injure, or overcome them. It could remain a secret, if it walked apart and avoided any mingling with the people who were so baldly opposed to it, any truckling down to her idea of the contradictory prose of life. Otherwise, it became just a common and cowardly species of deception to her.

As she watched and listened to Hervey, who was chitchatting with the very woman whom he had affected to despise on the previous night, and throwing distressed glances at the girl he claimed to love, Emmy Lou's lightness disappeared. Her relations with Hervey retrogressed halfway back to an ordinary intrigue with a professional, self-appointed lady-killer, though she fought against this inkling now, with all of the unstigmatized, unbesmirched needs within her heart. Oh, maybe she shouldn't blame him for not daring to incur the wrath of her aunt and all these stuffed-up people, maybe not, but she hated deception when it was so darn careful, and talky, and oh, crawling-like.

Hervey was rattled and restive. He didn't want Emmy Lou to see him strolling off with Mary, without the slightest explanation—that would be in his estimation a caddish slap which he simply could not inflict upon this bravely simple girl, who still bore the glow of last night's embraces condensed within her little, pink face. His man-secure airiness came to grief whenever he looked at Emmy Lou, and then he swore

inwardly and wondered what he should do, for Mary was pulling at his sleeve and whispering that she wanted to begin the stroll. He excused himself on the plea that he had forgotten something in his room, after which he hastened to the room and wrote a note to Emmy Lou. He slipped the note between the pages of a book, with the paper edge protruding, and after reappearing on the porch, he dropped the book on the window-sill beside Emmy Lou's chair and muttered a prayer of thanks because Mary's back happened to be turned at that particular moment. . . . Damn these hair's-breadth shaves caused by the inevitable combination of a willing, unusual, fetching lass and a crazy-warm summer night! This sex-game was the very spine and spice of a man's life, sure enough, but often it brought him lousy self-reproaches and awkward situations, where the least slip might release a fury of tongues against him. He would have to be a cad to Emmy Lou, eventually—this was positively the last time he would blacken himself with a moonstruck lie! —but he could not induce himself to come forth as one now, could not immediately step upon this quaint-serious, still alluring maid who sat and stared so inquiringly at him.

Emmy Lou had instantly divined the significance of the book, and after Hervey departed with Mary, she removed the note and read the following words: "Dearest Emmy: Please try to forgive me. I didn't want to go with Mary to-night, but she kept on begging me and I simply couldn't be rude and turn her down. I'll meet you to-morrow night behind the barn

and then I'll explain the whole thing to you. Please don't fail to come and don't lose your trust in me. I'm sending oodles and oodles of love to you. Ben."

After she had crushed the note and slipped it beneath the bosom of her dress, a ricochet of emotions sprang up within her breast. She was instinctively wise beyond her years—the eyes of a remarkably unwrapped soul checking the old alliance between inexperience and hope—and she spied a false undertone in Hervey's scrawl: a hasty smoothness just a bit too hasty to be true. He hadn't committed himself, and his promise of an explanation hinted at a spook in the woodshed, which he had been afraid to show her. Pressed for time, Hervey had thought that words of any reassuring kind would placate her, and he had underestimated her intelligence. Again, his breezy assumption that she was at his beck and call, that she would sneak off to meet him again, regardless of the appearance held by his actions, struck the bristly pride so closely attached to all the listening gentleness within her. Thought she would chase after him, did he, when he had coolly rambled off with the girl he professed not to care a row of beans about? How nice! She had a good notion to stay away to-morrow night and let him pursue her till his breath gave out before she relented and saw him again.

The pride, free from those serious wounds that can be engendered only by deep love, or its delusion, trailed out to a reasoning calmness, in which it still preserved its identity without a blinding objection. . . . No, she'd be fair to him even if he hadn't been

fair to her. She'd meet him and become absolutely certain of how he felt toward her. Face to face with him, she'd be able to tell no matter what he said—the weaponless, bare-breasted confidence of a girl unable to lie, unless she was protecting her desires and those of another person, and unable to believe that anyone could withstand the surge of this sensual honesty.

As she sat on the porch now, she felt unshaken below her immediate resentments and a little surprised at her own lack of biting concern. Funny, last night she had been wild about him for a time, and had even rocked the memory of his caresses to sleep with her afterwards, but now his possible deceit brought her only a cross between, oh . . . not yawning and not pain, but a spot in between that couldn't be described in words. The answer, bereft of the right words but pensively skirting them, took hold of her breast. Last night he had seemed to be her Dickie boy, ten years older then and urbanely proficient in the bandyings of the world, but still inwardly weepy, balked, and stumbly-tongued, beneath all that he had won from himself and life. The spell had fled when she had observed him on the porch with Mary, and even the smart gentleman-freebooter, which she had conceived him to be on the top, had been partly dispelled by his cheap persiflage with Mary and the others. Dick could never have twirled dubious jokes while pretending not to know the girl whom he claimed to love. Dick would have walked over to her and blurted out yearning words without a thought for the other people present.

She intended to see Hervey on the following night because it was a duty, because she wanted to be positive that her present feelings would last. . . . Almost peaceful now, she rocked to and fro and diverted herself by tabulating and ragging the boarders on the porch and lawn. "That Zender boy and Tessie Gunderson had turned whiter than Monday's wash when she had caught them in the hay-loft the other day. Only thirteen and fourteen too, and yet as wise as she was, only in their case it was such a cry-baby, trembly, sneaky-ugly wisdom . . . felt as though they should have been murdered for what they had tried to do, and yet couldn't help trying it . . . poor things. . . . They had begged her not to tell on them, lest they be sent to a reform-school—funny, wasn't it, how most grownups always wanted to lock up children for getting bold and being happy with each other, for finding out something that the grownups kept hidden. . . . Beulah Parker was relating for the seventieth time, at least, how she had chased a burglar from her house and swung his own lantern over his head—from the size of that meany old-maid, the poor burglar probably took one look and then gave up all hope of ever getting away. . . . Mr. and Mrs. Short were cooing at each other as though they were really fooling somebody—she could hear their screaming till midnight, after they retired. . . . And Clarence Eldridge, just purring at Mrs. Frank 'cause he was sweet on her daughter, Celia . . . heard him calling Mrs. Frank an old hatchet-face the other morning. . . ."

No, she wouldn't judge all the people in the world

by the ones at her aunt's boarding-shack—plenty of honest, forgiving, just-beautiful people must be existing in the world outside and she would meet, oh, sco-ores of them before she died. The thought brought a zigzagging, floreated rosiness to her spirit, and when Dora came out and proposed a game of casino in the kitchen, Emmy Lou rose with little, twitching bird-glistenings of smiles on her undaunted face. . . .

She met Hervey on the following night and repulsed his first attempt to kiss her. This action was only natural pique to him, and he retained his assurance as he rattled off a long-winded account—"he had decided that Emmy Lou was too young to know her own mind and that it would be better for both of them to wait a year and correspond steadily before they rushed into each other's arms again. You see, otherwise he might be accused of harming an inexperienced girl and using an older man's wiles to blind her—people were so darn sordid in such matters, and they could never separate false romance from true romance . . . from the beautiful, sincere feeling which he still had for her! . . . Of course, he did pity Mary because she was so madly in love with him, and he couldn't strike her square in the face and refuse to walk with her once in a while . . . couldn't do that . . . but he would actually remain true to Emmy Lou . . . cross his heart if he wouldn't! . . . and keep constantly in touch with her . . . write two letters every week, and maybe more . . . and then marry her when she became old enough to . . . well . . . to silence the wrong ideas of evil-minded folks! . . .

For the remainder of his stay at Hiersdale, however, perhaps they'd better just write to each other and stop these sweet, hungry-lovely meetings behind the barn . . . perhaps . . . for, after all, the least accident might lead to their detection and spoil their sane, patiently loving plans for the future. . . ."

He had gained his desire with Mary, on the previous night, and had become engaged to her, but he had persuaded her to defer any announcement until they returned to Chicago, on the plea that otherwise their fellow-boarders might snicker at the whole matter and call it a cheap, flitting, summer romance.

At the end of his fervid, stilted dodgings, broken only by leading-on questions from Emmy Lou, he felt ruefully wily and convincing, and told himself that he had escaped from a ticklish mess, through the sixty-horsepower cleverness of his mind. Yes, he had tried to let her down as easily as he could, because she was so damned sweet and honest that he couldn't work up enough heart to smash her in the face now, and because she still pulled at this craven heart much more than it dared to admit (the latter reason was not included in his self-remarks). His only half-punctured balloonings of self-esteem made him certain that he had succeeded in deceiving this ignorant, unarmed girl—deceived her from motives of guilt-nagged kindness! —but he confessed to himself, in the same breath, that it had been a dirty, singeing task and he swore that he would never again entangle himself in such a situation.

As he looked at her face now—dimly and pinkly

hung in the subtle dusk, like a lost, stemless floret defying gravitation, refusing to waver down—his conscious palladiums and sanctions deserted him for the time being: were replaced by a larger, wordless, plainly curling fire. What an unsoiled, soft-lipped, pansy-eyed elf of a girl she was—even the loss of precious modesties had been unable to drag her head down one inch now! Oh, to hell with Mary Crisswell and every other woman!

He tried to kiss her and turn her shoulders toward him, but she pushed him away and rose quickly to her feet. Highstrung aversions were on her face, though her heart was only striving to feel them. His glib expedients, pledges, verbiage, had failed to impress her to a fractional extent—wasn't it funny that all these ideas about separation and waiting had never occurred to him *before* she had given him all her mistaken fondness? Yes, funny as grandfather's crutch! Oh, he thought he was terribly foxy, playing two girls against each other, but she could see through him without the least effort! She had scores of naïvetés, but her ability to penetrate lying was independent of them and came from an ageless scorn for retreat and deviousness planted in her at birth. The man before her lost every iota of his previous appeal and changed to a boresome flesh-juggler, who had never really touched anything but his own clammy desires.

"I hate you"—she gave him a shove that almost made him fall from the camp-stool.

"No, you don't . . . don't say that, Emmy!"

A short silence.

"You're right . . . I don't"—she spoke slowly and without repugnance, merely using the words to push him away forever. "I don't even know you're alive . . . any more."

He was thunderstruck at first, and then his conceit made a last rally.

"You're just saying that because you don't think I love you, but I do!"

A short silence.

"You can save your breath, Ben. . . . I know what you are, but I'm not even angry about it. I'm very, very sorry for you 'cause you lied yourself blue in the face. You didn't *have* to . . . far's I'm concerned."

This coolness demolished him and he picked an anger from the wreckage.

"See here, I'm not accustomed to being called a liar. I won't stand for it!"

She gave him a smile, between coldness and pity, and walked away without another word—what was the use of talking any more? He'd only stick to his silly fibs, and she had uttered the few words that were necessary to show him that he hadn't fooled her.

He looked after her with an open mouth and a scarcely believing furore inside—what a shrewd one she was for a chit going on eighteen, and how he detested himself at this particular moment! He felt so small that he could have walked under the grassblades at his feet. Casanova's self-imagined pupil, often sentimentally distressed at the tuition, had been struck in his weakest spot, made to feel that he was a petty amateur unable to deceive even an ignorant school-

girl. Casanova's self-imagined pupil picked up his sacred straw hat: brushed a beetle from it: wavered between a curse and a self-weary sigh: and walked forlornly back to the flattering obtuseness of Mary Crisswell. . . .

Emmy Lou loitered near the barn—not caring to return to her stuffy room perched near the hayloft, and feeling in need of distraction. A leaf-thin emotion, not far away from emptiness, was in her breast—neither despondent nor injured but wondering whether her future life would always be like this night . . . searches for happiness followed by the revelation that she had been deceiving both herself and another person, who had been trying to deceive her—more deliberately. At this juncture, Tom Hiers walked up and spoke to her. His frown and clinky voice told her that "something was up," but her thinking-processes had stopped and she merely felt that she was "in for some sort of croaking" probably inspired by her tireless Aunt Sarah. He asked her to come to the deserted kitchen and have a private talk with him, and she assented with hardly a tremor of curiosity.

He had observed the roundabout passage of the note on the previous night, as he sat in the parlor behind the window-sill, and this detection had given him a stunned sultry-sullenness and a desire to protect his innocent cousin from Hervey's designs. He wanted to feel that he was chivalrous because he wanted to change himself from a girl-chaser to a repentant knight-errant, who sallied forth to punish the chaser in other men. He wanted to become a brave intruder

because bravery is never more than a thrust of fear deeply and awkwardly staging an unreal self-suicide. . . . However, his motives were not entirely false. He abominated Hervey, whom he regarded as a slick, inanely spruced-up city trifler with an unmanly talent for writing drippy songs, and he was quite sincere in his desire to keep his sweet cousin from contaminating herself with such a toad in trousers. Again, he liked Emmy Lou because she was, to him, so unaffectedly chummy, unsneaking, and "oh, girlish and yet ungirlishly bold in the very tiffs which she had with him. Guess she should have been born a boy. Girls were supposed to be coy, shifting, and standoffish, to *some* extent, and Emmy Lou could be as open and slambangy as a man, in spite of the softer ways that proved her sex."

He had eavesdropped behind the barn on this night —shrinking from the rôle of a spy but determined to save her—and had caught snatches of her conversation with Hervey, but not enough to be sure concerning how far she had gone with the man. He wanted to warn her now and find out what had transpired, and be as restrained and brotherly about it as he could. They sat in the drably scoured, clovey kitchen, with its glass, coal-oil lamps and oilcloth shrouds. He arose and locked the door that led to the pantry, which connected the kitchen and the two dining-rooms. Then he came back and sat down again, while Emmy Lou measured him with a grin. Looked like he had some secret to tell, but why?—he had never confided in her before. Oppressed by his task, he attacked Hervey

and begged her to watch out for "that lazy, no-good slicker."

Emmy Lou relaxed now and made the idlest of grimaces within the sleepiest of curtsies swung by her heart—jumping ca-ats, male relatives were always the same, bent on protecting a girl from the touch of any outside man whom they didn't like. Heigh-ho, wonder what they'd do, if a girl tried to shoo them away from their favorite damsels, or said to her father: "Now, I saw you speaking to Missus Tanterbanter this morning and I won't stand for it—she's *not* a decent person." . . . Heigh-ho, figs and lady-fingers. What would people do, if they couldn't get dreadfully serious or go into fits about the things other people were doing? Why, leave each other alone, think of it—last thing they e-ever did, far's she knew. Tommy meant so well . . . wasn't even anything bossy in his advice—nice relief, that—but nevertheless he was just bursting with the desire to meddle and give a jealous thrashing to Ben. Jealous of the family's good-name, if that made any sense . . . wanted to feel himself a big, big rescuer of poor girls in distress, but suppose the girl forgot that she ought to be distressed? . . . terrible to spoil rescues like that. . . . Ho, hum—she yawned inwardly as she heard the earnest, bashful tom-tom of his voice . . . ho, hum, things that were so important, outra-age-eous, to other people, always made her long to laugh and then check the desire on the ground that she had no right to be so disrespectful . . . bean-porridge hot, bean-porridge cold, bean-

porridge in the pot, nine days old. This wouldn't do—she wasn't even *listening* to him. . . .

When he confessed that he had spied on her that night, her flip inattention vanished. It was in her to loathe any action that faintly smacked of underhandedness, unless this quality, far from being an intrusion, was adopted only to prevent other people from intruding upon another person's private business. This detestation sprang not only from the idealism of her youth, stainless to itself, but also led back to a solitary, unclad pride that wanted to walk, unimpeded, to its own destiny—that deathless, ruthless feeling of being accountable only to oneself, which "benevolent" busybodies can never understand. She would never blame anyone but herself: never seek to force anyone to follow her wishes: repel the advice of others, unless it coincided with the weakness or strength that she was cradling for the moment.

"You didn't have any right to sneak up on me to-night—it wasn't your business"—her voice had a disgusted quiver.

He had been half-expecting her anger, and he was ashamed of what he had done, but he decided to brazen it out for her own good. God, no man li-iked to be a peeper, but nevertheless it was necessary to guard his dear, unwise cousin from that insincere, perked-up petticoat-grabber.

"Well, I had to find out what was going on—that Hervey chap's a sly potato, and I didn't want him to take you in. I know how *he* acts with girls."

"Oh, yes? So, why didn't you come up and ask *me*

then—you didn't think I would lie to you, did you?"

He lowered his head, felt tripped and upset—guess he *had* used the wrong tactics, but still, she mustn't be allowed to slip out just on this issue.

"I'm sorry, Emmy—I shouldn't have played sneak, I know . . . but just the same I wish you'd stay away from him. All he wants is to make love to all the girls here and then go back to town and brag about it. He's no good, Emmy, right down to his shoes."

As she looked at him, her wrath sheered into nods between lightest vexation and tolerance—he was just a grumbly, blundering cousin and he hadn't realized the meanness of his action because he had been wrapped up in *saving* her—getting her to follow what *he* thought was good for her. My, would anyone ever walk up and say: "This is *bad* for you, but go right ahead, Emmy—you'll have to find out for yourself"?

"All right, Tommy, let's call it quits . . . besides, I don't care the least bit for him now."

A two-seconds' pause.

"I thought I did for a little while, but he couldn't fool me long. He's just a silly fibber, that's all, and he's so stuck-up he thinks he owns the e-earth."

Her words alarmed him in spite of their carelessness. "Thought she did for a while"—say, how far *had* she gone with this cunning lady-killer? It was a darn delicate question and he didn't know how to ask it, but he simply had to find out somehow—if this Hervey had gone past spooning with Emmy Lou, managed to turn her head with all kinds of promises under the moonlight, he'd have to show how strong he was with

me-en instead of trusting girls who swallowed his truck for a time.

"See here, did he do something . . . did you let him . . . let him . . ."—he longed to be a thousand miles away and yet clung to his fist-doubled flinching.

She remained silent, and darkness crept into the studying of her blue eyes—prying, pry-yi-ing, that was all people ever did. Didn't a girl have a right to make her own mistakes and take her own idea of pleasure for one night without everybody questioning her, and pawing over what she had done, and raising Cain, calling her names, feeling sorry for her? All of this bad, ba-ad, that people threw at her—why had the good Lord given bodies to human beings if he didn't want them to extract all the happiness from them that they could? And why couldn't a girl be responsible to herself, instead of obeying older people? They claimed to know more about what should be done than she did but that didn't seem to make them very happy in their own lives, as far as she had noticed: didn't prevent them from quarreling with each other . . . looking too sad for words sometimes . . . moping and drooping as though not a single thing interested them.

Tom mistook her silence for the fear that he would "tell on her," if she confided in him, and he spoke now to rescue her trust.

"You needn't be afraid, Emmy—I won't give you away no matter what you did. If there's one thing I'm *not*, it's a tattle-tale."

A short silence.

"Come on, Emmy, don't be afraid of *me*. If he did

anything bad to you, he's the one *I'll* blame—he's a smooth one, through and through, and he knows a darn sight more about the world than you do."

Another short silence.

"Please now, Emmy . . . you tell me just what happened . . . go on . . . I'll stick by you 'cause I like you plenty—you just don't know how to take care of yourself when a slob trots around. . . . I'll manage it slick as a whistle, don't you fear—pick a quarrel with him over something else and then whale the daylight out of him. He's got it coming to him."

His last words broke through the abstracted brooding, in which she had listened with only an unresponsive portion of her ears, and struck an iron opposition —"fight, fi-ight, Saturday night . . . fight, fi-ight, hit him for spite." . . . She remembered the battle-cry of the boys in the recess-yard, when she had been in the seventh grade of elementary school. Fight . . . was that all that people could ever think of, whether they did it with their mouths or hands? She was as much to blame as Hervey—if people *had* to be blamed for wanting something so much that they couldn't hold back—and all the punching in the world would never take the conceit out of *him:* he was made that way. Besides, if she had hurt anyone it had been herself only, and if Tom really was on her side, the best thing he could do would be to keep his mouth shut and his hands to himself! If he liked her, he shouldn't want to make trouble for her and give the older people a chance to swing their hatchets out.

"Don't you start any fights on my account. If you

do, Tom Hiers, I'll never, never talk to you for the rest of my life! Ben didn't rope me into anything. I let him make love to me 'cause . . . 'cause I wanted him to."

"Wa-wanted him to? Say, if you talk like that, you'll make me think you're a bad girl, Emmy."

"Go ahead and thi-ink it then—I can't stop you. . . . All of this bad and ba-ad—I don't think it's bad to feel happy for a while, unless I'm hurting somebody else."

She had the old feeling of temerity and doggéd resistance to it, as she spoke. She might indeed be a terrible girl, as her mother claimed, but what was the use of acting like a good one if she felt otherwise, felt that she had done nothing which her inner voices and choices considered to be wrong? Tom listened to her with a riot in his breast—begrudging admiration for her guiltless, head-high nerviness, and another emotion which tried to tell him that she was a foolish, loose, ignorant girl who needed to be paddled and then locked up for a time, lest she wind up in the traditional gutter which waited for all dissolute women. The lessons of his environment, drummed in by the poses and pushings of animals no longer certain of themselves but still two-thirds animal, spoke loudly within him, but a whisper of what he termed "all-fired common sense," fought against the noise, even downed it at times. Oh, there *was* a load of poppycock attached to this wail about not being decent—it was healthy and natural for men and women to want each other and they couldn't *always* stamp it out and wait to be married. Besides,

take the farm-women around South Haven—most of them were broken-down, spavined, and a good ten years younger than they looked, and able to count on five fingers all the joys they had ever drawn out of their lives. A woman who set a fast pace usually went to pieces around forty, but she had plenty of fun while it lasted . . . short and sweet, or long and sour, was what it all amounted to. Of course, a decent woman had the love of her children and everyone respected her, spoke well of her—to her face anyway—but that didn't always fill up the long, winter evenings, or keep her from quarreling with her own kind, or make her glad to get up in the morning. . . . "Yes, that's well enough, Tom, but what would the world come to, if everyone went ahead and did as they damn pleased? What a mob-scene that would be!" The main thing about being moral and law-abiding was that it kept a person snug and peaceful, and prevented other people from heckling him, soiling him with their tongues. Maybe he did lose a heap of good times, wild happiness, that way, but he was more certain of the few things he had then, and more likely to hold on to them.

"Looka here, I'm no old preacher, Emmy—I don't give a whoop in hell for all this goody-goody stuff and I never did!"

"Hurray for you, Tommy—that's what *I* like to hear."

Short silence.

"But just the same, Emmy, we've got to live up to other folks' ideas about being decent, 'cause if we

don't, we'll wind up in the mud sure as shooting."

Another silence.

"I don't think you're old enough to know what you're doing and whether you ought to do it. That's what I've got against that louse, Ben Hervey—he's been through all the tricks and he used them on you 'cause he knew you weren't hep to them. He'd never dare to try them on a woman who knows the game, the dirty louse."

The flick of enthusiastic cameraderie left her and she looked sadly at him. The old story again—calling names, and saying that a girl had to sit down and fold her hands till she became old enough "to know what she was doing," to lose all the first joy of youth. If it was wrong for her to be free with herself when she was eighteen—almost eighteen—then why wouldn't it be just as wrong later on? Hervey wasn't a louse, but a coward—couldn't stand the thought of other people wading into him for what he had done, and then tried to lie his way out of it. Like her poor, sweet Dickie boy when he wrote that last letter telling her he didn't love her and they'd better give each other up. But how could anyone blame a person for backing down when so many people were anxious to take a kick at him, and when they had the upper hand and could get him arrested, talked about, kept out in the cold? Even she became mighty wishy-washy sometimes—not really afraid for herself, but willing to do a-anything if it would only keep this endless pounding from her ears!

"Listen, Tommy . . . did you ever make love to a

girl—a girl like me, I mean—did you ever make up to her and then give her the cold mitten? I'm not saying you did—I'm just asking you."

His face grew red under the tan and his thin lips moved up and down a sixteenth of an inch beneath befuddled ghosts of words. Brr, what a jam a man was in, telling anybody else what to do and slamming other men, unless he'd been an angel himself. If he answered her question truthfully now, she'd have it on him and he'd have to shut up ever afterwards, and yet he felt that the question was unfair. The two South Haven girls whom he had successfully courted had been just as insincere as he had—carried away for the moment and then ashamed as the deuce afterwards and begging him never to tell the real beaux whom they had decided to marry sometime. He hadn't been a city dude coming up to South Haven to have his sport with the girls there when they became moony and slushy at night, and then waltz back and laugh at the easiness of summer-resort chitlings. He had been raised near these two girls, had known them for years without doing more than kiss them at parties, until a barn-dance and too much hard cider on different nights had burned up his veins: made him forget everything but the musky, softly husky, crazy-smooth nearness of shoulders and bosoms, knees and hips. He hadn't fished for them in a cold, sober way, hadn't just tried to add another pair to his list, like that doggone skunk, Hervey!

Still flushing, he spoke as though he were chopping stone.

"I don't claim to be an angel, Emmy, but I'm not as rotten's Hervey is. If I lose my head over a girl . . . once in a blue moon . . . I'm darn sorry for it afterwards."

Silence intervened again.

"You take my advice, Emmy, and you keep a middling tight rein on yourself—there's no sense in bucking the whole shooting-match. Just wait till you run across a fine chap and he wants to marry you like blazes! That's the only thing a girl can do, if she doesn't want to drag herself down."

The grave kindness of his words dropped within her, like gray crumbs from the hand of an entire world, and she closed her eyes while shivers chased each other in her girlish heart. Tommy wasn't the worst of them. He didn't think it was so miserably wicked for a girl to take what she wanted when she wasn't damaging anything except other people's notions and, maybe, herself. He just told her that she couldn't stand out against mobs of powerful grownups without, oh, landing in jail—where they had wanted to put poor Dickie—or being shunned by nearly everybody.

The mood-germ of black compliance could not survive. Inwardly, she tossed her head and smiled coldly—they could attack her to their heart's content but they'd never make her budge. Long as her conscience felt light, what did she care? They couldn't do much to her after she became twenty-one. . . . She'd be only too glad to marry a man, if she loved him enough, and she was sure that the love would last and he wanted to marry her, but until that happened—if it ever

did!—she would do exactly as she pleased and take anything that could swing her from her feet and make her believe that she was happy, if only for a second. She had had plenty of sadness during the past two months, and no doubt she would have more of it in the future, from time to time—hope not, but that might be the unavoidable way in which people paid for their happiness. If they didn't take all the happiness that they could get, then what were they paying for? Nothing!

After a long silence, she looked at him, like a Magdalene-mother striving to comfort one of her puzzled boys, and said: "I like you—you don't wriggle 'round the way most people do."

Short silence again.

"Guess I'll never change much, Tommy. I'll always chase after everything I want and I'll always get in dutch on account of it! . . . D'you ever try to change yourself, Tommy?"

He mumbled a disclaimer and remained silent—what was the use of talking, talking—people went their own way no matter what anybody else said, unless they were too weak to know their own wills—just human weather-cocks with the gilt rubbing off—but he did wish that poor Emmy Lou would be eventually able to drive some horse-sense into her head. If she couldn't, she'd be in for a peck of sorrow and spit-balls before she died.

He left her, resolved not to admonish her again but still determined to bash Hervey and make the latter man "go slow" in the future. . . . The next twenty-four hours brought disastrous culminations to Emmy

Lou. Sarah had been listening behind the kitchen-door, from the start of the conversation, with a warped intertwining of outraged surprise and disowned satisfaction—the pet reactions of many a rigid, minor moralist, but heightened in her case because a relic of youth was still wedged in her heart: a defiled sigh that sometimes split her asunder when she tossed sleeplessly in her bed at midnight. Her waking hours had to be shrill and virtuous to the point of breaking, to gird themselves against that still, terrifying hour when she rested alone upon her bed, and could not close her eyes, and felt a mangled memory crawling in the darkness, and shrank to a helpless blot on the quilts, and cried in vain for all of her lying words.

Toward the end, she had barely resisted the impulse to pound on the locked door, gain admittance, and flail her niece then and there—in her present temper she might scream all over the kitchen and be overheard by some of the boarders, and besides, she wanted to take in every last word of this indecent revelation. No, it would be wiser to wait until morning and then drive the depraved hussy out, bag and baggage—niece or no niece! A girl could be forgiven for one mistake, but when she flung herself at a second man, with the first one scarcely passed, she must be determinedly brazen, immune to salvation, unless the harshest measures were employed. As for that son of hers, she'd hand him a hiding he'd never forget—actually encouraging Emmy Lou and sympathizing with her vileness! Of course, Tom had only tried to wheedle his way around the child's nasty stubbornness, but he

should have known that it would do no earthly good to coddle her, that she would only persist in talking back and trying to defend herself! That Hervey fellow was a rotten egg too, but men were not supposed to be as decent and careful as women—natural for them to have at least a touch of hairy devil in them—and again, for all she knew, Emmy Lou might have led *him* on! She'd have to bounce him out, too, but it would have to be done quietly and tactfully—couldn't risk a scandal and lose money besides, since the brute was very popular among her boarders. Oh, she wasn't coin-counting in everything—she had her rock-clad principles!—but she simply had to protect herself and her family in a world, which was good on the whole, but mighty practical when you came down to it. . . . No, no, she had no hatred for Emmy Lou, in spite of the girl's saucy, loose bawdiness—blood-ties couldn't be wiped out no matter what the person was, alack—but nevertheless her affection had been cruelly wounded and insulted—and she would *have* to ship the girl back to her parents. It was their duty to handle such a baggage, and not hers—she had enough trials and demands of her own.

(O morass of human motives always justified to themselves, always crowded with people barely able to keep their chins above the black level, while dreaming that they are flying through skies of perilous nobilities—words can only fling inklings of what transpires far below the swampy scene, and one man's report is as good as another's.) . . .

Emmy Lou was aroused by a hand tugging at her

shoulder and blinked drowsily at her aunt, who was stooping over the wooden-bed in the hay-loft room. The hour was six A.M. and bird-cadenzas rose between the moos and neighings of cows and horses below, while a shaft of light slanted from the half-open, green-shaded window, with motes of silver dust dancing through it.

"What d'you want? . . . I'll be up in a minute."

Sarah sat on the edge of the bed and frowned at her niece.

"You're going to catch the nine o'clock boat and clear out of here—better hop out of bed and start to pack up your things."

"What's the ma-atter now?"— Emmy Lou spoke slowly, with her mind still sleep-drugged.

"O-Oh, don't act innocent with me-e—I heard every word you said to Tom last night! You've been carrying on with that Hervey man, just like you did with the other chap in the city. I've tried my best to watch you and keep you straight, but you're too much for me to handle!"

Seconds of silence.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself through and through—acting like a common trollop and disgracing all of us!"

Silence again.

"You're going to pack up your duds and go back to town this very morning, d'you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Ye-es! Is that all you've got to say? Why, you

poor, brazen thing, you ought to hang your head down and beg me to forgive you!"

As she peered at this woman, whose gray eyes were like ice-discs above a frosty, twisted nose, a combustion of rage made Emmy Lou leap out of the bed and scowl at her aunt. Sarah suddenly became the epitome of rude, squawking, blind ugliness to her—all of the world condensed into an alien figure and striking, striking at the dear, sacred, private matters in her heart, without the slightest desire to understand them, meet them half way.

"You go away and let me alone—you're a dirty, mean woman! You wouldn't let my father pay for me 'cause you needed somebody to help you 'round the house, and you knew you could get *me* for nothing. I've worked my back out ever since I came here, and I've taken your scoldings till I'm sick of them! Everything looks bad to you 'cause you've got a bad mind yourself, and I don't care one bit for you, even if you a-are my aunt! Why, listen, I wouldn't stay here another day if you went down on your knee-es to me! I hate the very sight of you!"

She sprang at her aunt and shoved her toward the door. Jerking it open, she threw her body at the bulkier woman and sent her toppling into the areaway, after which she slammed and bolted the door, and hastily dressed herself. Sarah had been too flabbergasted to exert her superior strength against Emmy Lou's slimness, but she regained her wits afterwards and struck the door with her fists as she commanded Emmy Lou to unfasten it. This affront to the dignity

and authority of her greater age was too stinging to be endured—she'd take that brat across her knees and spank her till she yelled for mercy, spank her so hard that she'd never dare to insult another decent woman over twice her age!

With a stony, contorted face, Emmy Lou ignored the noise and continued to dress. She wasn't afraid but she'd take her sweet time about opening the door—through with accepting orders from that ugly, old woman! At this juncture, Tom Hiers, attracted by the clamor, hurried up to the loft and pulled his mother away. Emmy Lou listened to their voices, as they clambered down the stair-ladder—the high-pitched expletives of her aunt against Tom's bass remonstrances. Listening, Emmy Lou suddenly smiled—wasn't it funny how people screamed, or went into the tears, the minute anybody told them the truth about themselves, pushed them outside and ordered to trot along and mind their own business? Even, if they thought it wasn't the truth, why couldn't they act quiet and talk it over? She had only raised her own voice an inch, a few minutes ago, in spite of her scorn for the nagging, old thing. . . . People could make her furious only for a short time, only until she realized that their efforts were deliciously funny because they were so powerless to swerve her desires, resolves. She *wasn't* unusually selfish—she'd never believe it! She was simply determined to follow her notion of romantic loveliness, no matter how often it turned out to be deceit, and to find things out for herself instead of taking other people's words for them! . . .

The next two hours became hurriedly vaporous to her. Outside events, mannerisms, were stray titters, thumb-twiddlings, to her, scarcely glimpsed by a mood strainedly eager to fly away from this resort and all its people: to luxuriate in the absence of meaningless attacks: to touch and speak afterwards to whomever and whatever it pleased. The furtive sympathy of Dora and Tom's tussle between respect and sorrow, warmed her topmost heart and then slid into nothingness. These two liked her and she liked them—a moderate chumminess on her part—but they were only sadly tied-up creatures in the immediate scene from which she longed to flee. Even her aunt's mortally slapped silence, detestation, became the ludicrousness of a shoved-aside harpy. She knew that Sarah would immediately write to Chicago—wasn't that old crow just pining to get back at her?—and she was determined not to return home, no matter what the cost might be. The howl over her dear, sweet Dickie boy had been painful enough, but no-ow they'd be on top of her all the time, with all kinds of tears, bawlings-out, watchings. They'd have a last try at re-efo-ormiing her and do it up brown this time. Why, she'd be little more than a prisoner, without a shred of privacy except when she went to bed at night, and the lord only knew how long it would continue. . . .

Oh, Emmy Lou, moodiness descends upon the great, wind-snatching song of your youth: allegations of faulty affection to the people, who gave birth to you, cut through your heart: falterings contend with the untaught wail of your desire to walk alone. Drive

them out, dear, dear Emmy Lou. Give your heart an infinite capacity for pain and happiness. Laugh at all the envious, moralizing, sophistical killjoys on earth. You are wiser than they ever will be, despite all of their rabid shoutings, quieter harness-deals, rational arguments—secretly bored with themselves—wise enough to court every flower and cudgel, real and false, that you can reach. Life is a cruel second, Emmy Lou—a cruel, poorly compensated, and often self-wracking second—and this host of normal, restrained ones will be swept out, with you, to face a common mystery. Life is an array of play-boys, play-girls, on one side, and actual artists on the other, with a mass of self-blind, slavish babblers in between—slaves of every kind, from communist to burgher, street-sweeper to king, strumpet to housewife. . . .

As she sat in the barn and waited for Tom to harness the horse to the buggy, Emmy Lou struggled with her resolve not to return home. Would it be right to scoot off without even a single letter afterwards? Her parents might worry themselves sick, since they wouldn't know what was happening to her, and whether she was dead or alive. Wasn't she a monstrous girl for even thi-inking of such an action? . . . The battle of yes and no went on until a light slowly pervaded her heart, neither brutal nor sacrificial, but saturated with the self-disregarding wistfulness of one who had chosen her road. She might indeed be a wicked, selfish girl, but she would have to stick to what she was in that case, since she felt so positive that she would never change, never wish that she had acted or spoken

differently. She didn't share the ideas, the emotional tactics, of the people who should have been near and dear to her: didn't see how they could tell so many lies, both to themselves and others, and still hold their heads up: couldn't understand why they wriggled and tied themselves down in every way, to keep from being happy, and then still called it happiness when their very faces contradicted them. It seemed to her that they were always kicking themselves and then becoming angry, or sorry, when another person refused to do the same thing to himself. . . . If she went back to Chicago now, she would only cause tons of misery, tons of squabbling, for her parents and herself, and then run away at some future date. Neither she nor they would ever back down—they were hopeless when it came to understanding what was going on within her!—and she couldn't hurt them more now than at some later time. If she wrote to them, then they'd have a clue to her whereabouts and drag her back! . . . Oh, it wouldn't be easy—she'd be tempted many and many a time to send a letter, or travel back, tormented by the thought of their sad, worrying, wrinkly-browed faces—but she would *have* to grit her teeth and carry it through. Otherwise, they would always be quarreling and suffering face to face and . . . that wasn't much of a difference! . . . Possibly, if she visited them after a year or two, they would realize that they couldn't hold her down, and make the best of it. She still loved her father enough to wince at the thought of injuring him—he was just like she was, but he would never admit it to his dying breath! . . . funny,

funny old Henrikins—mean as the devil in big things and so sweet and understanding in small ones. Still, she couldn't make her whole life sad just because he was determined to hide from himself and shower her with little favors to keep her from hating the fact that he had locked her in her room! As for her mother, that was a closed story . . . she had tried and tried to love mother till her breath gave out, and yet . . . she couldn't! Mother told so-o many stingy-gray fibs and then swore that they were true: and never cared about anyone except herself, in spite of all the lovely words she poured out to deny her selfishness. Mother could be unbelievably cruel and then wonder why you weren't thanking her for stepping on you! Mother was always intent upon helping or punishing someone "for his own good." Own good!—who appointed mother to be always the great judge of what was good, or bad, for people? All mother ever cared for was to smile at people when they bowed down to her wishes and scratch their eyes out when they didn't. Cold girl or not, she could never love her mother. . . .

Filled with an approach to finalities, still a bit grimly shaky but drawing nearer and nearer to wistful peace, Emmy Lou decided to slip away from the excursion-boat, after her farewell with Tom, and take a train to Kalamazoo, Michigan. She had four dollars—her father had mailed her a dollar every week—and the fare couldn't be much more than two. She would have to find work immediately in Kalamazoo, of course, but it would be a relief to get paid for it, instead of

drudging for nothing because she was "a me-embe-er o-of the fa-amily"—how sweet!

When Tom helped her into the buggy, her inner house was almost in order, but an unexpected incident rapped at one of the doors. Mary Crisswell appeared, with distress and dislike touched by the effects of recent weeping on her round face, and begged Emmy Lou to draw aside and talk to her, if only for a minute. Tom, sober and nervous, tried to hurry Emmy Lou off with the plea that she would be late for the boat, but her responsive curiosity could not be denied. She had never been deeply averse to this "spiffy fraud" with her society-posings, parasol-twirlings—never regarded her as more than a comical rival at first, and then as the feminine counterpart of Hervey, invisible, and scarcely worth the compliment of a frown.

She descended from the buggy and walked behind the barn, with Mary. After they had halted beside one of the pig-sties, Mary faced Emmy Lou for a few seconds without speaking—twisting her handkerchief and opening and closing her eyes slowly. She dreaded the thought of lowering herself to this tart, young brat, who might be laughing her head off secretly, but she had gone too far to retrace her steps now without making herself absurd. Discomfiture and jealousy made her loose mouth tremble, though she told herself again and again that she was only anxious to find out the truth and safeguard herself from deception: that such a "frumpy kitchen-jade" was powerless to strike her.

"Tell me, what's the trouble?"— Emmy Lou scanned the other woman with a blank seriousness.

Mary tried to answer but the words withered in her mouth—oh, lord, it was so-o difficult to humiliate herself before this gloating chit!

"Ple-ease, what did you want to talk to me about—is it about Ben?"

"Yes, it's . . . about Mr. Hervey."

"Well?"

"We-ell . . . I'm terribly upset about something . . . something dreadful happened an hour ago. Tom Hiers and Mr. Hervey had a fight out on the front lawn . . . oh, such a bru-tal, horrible fight! . . . and we've had to call a doctor for Mr. Hervey. It looks like his nose is broken."

"My, I'm awf'lly, awf'lly sorry to hear that"—Emmy Lou turned and frowned in the direction of Tom and the buggy.

Oh, this endless fighting between men! It never gave them more than a bunged-up face, or a chance to show off their muscles, and half the time it was just plain jealousy, no matter how much they tried to smooth it over.

"Oh, never mind that—I don't care whether you're sorry or no-ot"—Mary's confidence revived a little in the face of Emmy Lou's seemingly mild attitude. "I'm interested in something much more important."

"Yes?"

"A-all the people here are saying the fight happened because Mr. Hervey did something . . . did something wrong to you. I want to find out whether it's tru-ue. . . . I've got to find out."

A short silence.

"I'm engaged to Mr. Hervey, and it means a great deal to me. If he made love to *you,* I'll break the engagement off this very day!"

Emmy Lou continued her silence while she turned the matter over in her mind. Her first impulse was to rap the other woman's face with words: take away her desperate antithesis of almost-tearful hardness: give her the part of a credulous, cheaply deceived woman and enjoy the sight of all her punctured inflations. The malice lasted only a moment. Malice could be a retaliatory stirring in Emmy Lou's heart—a gnomish desire to shatter another person's frappéd snobbery—but it was always immediately squashed by half-heartedness. She could be angry, straightly friendly, loving, or indifferent, but she was incapable of the oblique, poisonous shades between these four divisions.

As she looked at Mary's shifty-eyed face, which was downcast and yet tried intensely to be at ease, Emmy Lou felt a snuggling of pity and disinterest—the desire to pat the other's cheek ever so lightly and then glide away, instantly forget her. Oh, sure, this Mary was a cry-baby under all her fine, peppery talk—look how the corners of her mouth were twitching. If Mary discovered that Ben had lied to her, it would break her precious, big opinion of herself to pieces—she wasn't the kind that could be happy for a short while and then toss her head, walk off gladly, when it turned out to be a mistake. She wasn't so deeply in love with Ben—"too much of my own mother in *her*"—but she had set her heart on marrying him, making her idea of a splendid catch, and chances were that he *would* marry

her too—she had rafts of money, and money was a huge item to him. . . .

A sigh and a laugh played tag within Emmy Lou—funny, she saw through Ben Hervey so beautifully now, and yet he had been transformed, boy-white, on that one happy night. She felt as though she had grown ten years during the past few days—graduated from dear, jumbly, innocent Dicky to a brassy, grown-up male who had opened her eyes to previously undivined tricks and deceits.

Mary mistook Emmy Lou's extended silence for taciturn ill-will, and forced herself into a nerve-ridden gushing pretense of friendliness, lest she be defeated in her questioning.

"Won't you ple-ease answer me . . . ple-e-ease. I haven't the least thing against you, you poo-or, dear chi-ild. Honestly I haven't. Not the le-east thi-ing. All I want is to find out whether I've been mistaken about . . . about Mr. Hervey . . . and I'll believe a-anything you tell me. I kno-ow you wouldn't lie in a serious matter like thi-is."

Emmy Lou smiled, patted the other woman's hair, and said: "You needn't be afraid. He didn't do a single thing to me—he's a perfect gentleman. It's all the fault of that rotten cousin of mine—he saw Ben talking to me alone one night and then he got all sorts of wild notions in his head."

Mary's heart expanded with delighted relief, and in the throes of this reversal she told herself that it would be small not to feel . . . we-ell . . . a ca-asual friendship for this maligned, young thing, in spite of the

thing's previous snootiness. Emmy Lou must be telling the truth—the girl would have been bursting over with a jealous desire for revenge, if Ben had wronged her.

"I'm so-o, so-o glad to hear you say that. You can't imagine the load you've taken off my heart, and I'll ne-e-ever be able to thank you enough!"

Emmy Lou sighed impatiently. Now that she had spared a woman who was of no real importance to her, her only remaining desire was to walk away. Mary's thanks—"prob'bly insincere"—grated on her ears.

"I haven't done anything to be tha-anked for—it was only right for me to tell you the truth. . . . I've got to catch the boat now, so I'll have to hustle off. . . . G'Bye."

As Emmy Lou hurried away, she felt a breath of self-chiding . . . hated lies and then told them . . . white fibs weren't always so wh-i-ite . . . butter and soap . . . make people hope. . . . Oh, forget about it.

THIRD SECTION

THIRD SECTION

"Mister Jefferson—lo-ord—play that barbershop cho-ord! That soothing ha-armony . . . has made an awful, awful, a-awfu-ul hit with me! Oh, play that stra-ain . . . just to please me aga-ain, 'cause, Mister, when you stri-ike that mi-inor cho-ord, I feel myself asli-ipping and your melody a gri-ipping . . . oh, lo-ord . . . play that barbershop cho-o-rd!"

The period of ragtime was serenading the growing material frenzy of America—a marchy, devil-may-care, Ethiopian rhythm, which was to be the forerunner of jazz music. Ragtime seized the skip of the two-step, schottische, and quadrille, and made them brisker, pulled a faster and more openly carnal glee from the former, sentimentally held-back gambols. Ragtime was the sweat-purifying scamper of Plantation negroes, commandeered by whites to entertain the increasing exhaustions of a commercial age that was becoming more and more elaborate, ruthless, machine-mad. Ragtime was a natural one-step, later to be disciplined, vitalized, stripped, by jazz music. . . .

More than a year had passed since her flight from South Haven, and Emmy Lou was over nineteen. She sat in her furnished room in Kalamazoo and listened to "The Barbershop Chord," with critical and rapt responses knocking in her heart. Kinda si-illy, but trippy lovey-dovey . . . feeling pert and shovey . . . trippy

lovey-dovey dove. . . . Ragtime was common but she didn't care—so was living, when she wasn't changing it to suit herself. The phonograph was made of tin, with a long, tin horn, and had a black cylinder-record which revolved perpendicularly. After the record started, a male voice could be heard announcing the name of the selection and the firm producing it. The words and music were scratchy, glass-splintery, but they held a disturbing magic to Emmy Lou. Wasn't it wonderful, putting words and music into a black roll and then digging them out with an ordinary needle? Mm, yes . . . but if everything was going to be canned in the future, wouldn't it take the joy out of living? People wouldn't go to concerts and shows any more and they could hold their dances right at home . . . no more zippy-dippy planning, walking around, guessing, when everything fell into a person's lap. And they were even talking of a marvelous, new invention—a machine that made pictures mo-ove on a white sheet where you could see what men and women did! Wouldn't that be unbelievable—people jumping on a sheet just as though they were the real ones themselves. My, yes . . . made the old, stereopticon-slides look like nothing! But, if a person could see everything that was going on, he wouldn't think and wonder about life any more —just snatch it from that blame old sheet and then go off and forget about it 'cause it was so darn plain and easy. Like telephoning to somebody—talking never really made her happy if the person wasn't face to face with her. . . . Of course, folks would learn a heap of things that they had never known about before, and

they wouldn't be just plastered over with the place where they lived, but they'd lose the fun of traveling out and finding, doing things for themselves. Gosh almighty, if you could sit down in a chair all the time and have everything brought to you—sights, music, words—you'd never have any adventures yourself . . . just eat up the bold or laughy things other people were doing . . . just be an open bag—everything pouring in, nothing coming out . . . couldn't keep yourself from getting fat and dull with those crazy and . . . and . . . yes, he-eartless, that was it . . . those crazy, heartless machines doing everything for you. . . .

Oh, heck, how her mind loved to wander, act as though it had the ability to look into big, important things. It would probably never happen, and even if it did, only dumpy, lumpy people would rely on it entirely, while others still hopped out and nosed around when they weren't working. . . . It was six-thirty now . . . that cuckoo-clock was always five minutes slow—maybe the cuckoo got tired and ordered the wheels to give him a rest! Emmy, don't talk like a child. . . . Well, I am a child and I'm going to stay one till I'm dead. I've had enough rotten experiences during the past year to make me an old woman, but nothing ever will—they can't reach me-e, the real me-e . . . the girl who took a party with her dear, dear Dickie and then raced home. And she was scared as the devil but determined to stick by what she had done and not believe all the horrible names people were going to call her.

I'll always be a child deep down where nobody can touch me—a scrappy, singy child—and I'll always live

in my own world and nobody will be able to walk into it except other children . . . children who act hard, snarly, and grownup, only because other people would stamp them to death, if they didn't. . . . When you're a grownup child you're a teeny-weeny bit different from a real one—you don't believe in Santa Claus and storks, fairies and neighb'rly love, 'cause you know they were made up by mean, wheezy people who want to talk nice and white, and dodge away from the covered-up things in their lives, and keep you from seeing just how afraid and mean they are. They'll read you the lovely story about Princess Griselda, who fell madly in love with a scullion in the king's pantry and flew away with him on the back of a white swan, and lived in a hut with him, deep in the forest, till the friendly forest-elves went back to her father, the ill-tempered king, and played on their leafy harps and induced the king to forgive her and her beloved one. Then, when you're a few years older, they'll tear your e-eyes out if you do anything slashy and flashy to make *you* happy. . . .

Where did I start from? . . . Oh, yes, grownup children are a teeny-weeny bit different from real ones 'cause they think up their own fairy-tales and don't care whether the stories are not true, as long as they can cling to them for a while before they have to go back to scrubbing floors, or selling sewing-machines, or keeping other people's hands away from them. They try to *live* the fairytales a little, instead of just reading them out of Hans Andersen. They've bumped against the ugliness and lies and cruel acts in the world—like I've started to—and they've got to escape to fairytales

sometimes, else they'd kill themselves. They find another child dreamer working himself out to the bone maybe, and they make up stories with him. The armchair they're cuddling in is a throne, and when the landlady raps on the door they're tossing her some money from their vast fortune, to settle the affairs of state. . . . That's an uppy line—affa-airs of state . . . they were always exclaiming it in that Graustark book I read last week. I'll use it after this whenever I want to excuse myself from the room. . . .

But let's see, where was I again? Oh, what grownup children do after they meet each other, and one's a man and the other's a woman. They buy a pound of hamburger steak and while they're eating it they stop and tell the waiter that the quail wasn't broiled enough to-night and will he never remember to get the toast even-burnt? The waiter isn't there, but when you're make-believing, such trifles never occur to you. But he *is* there in a way—you can see him so clearly. There are two kinds of truth, I think—the kind that you fight with every day, to keep it from rapping you too hard, and the kind that's inside of you and doesn't even know that you're being rapped. . . . Now what else do grownup children do together? Oh, certainly, they make love to each other without being married—they adore the fairytale that they're going to stay together fo-or-e-ever because they want to and not because they made a vow before a preacher. . . . "Some folks say that a preacher won't stea-eal. I caught ten in my cornfiel'." . . . Oh, get back to your story about the grown-

up children—it takes the kinks out of your shoulder-blades.

Well, they live together, and when they separate they don't call each other bad names because children are too eager to see what's around the next corner, while . . . while, well . . . grownup grownups like to hang on to what they've had, 'cause they're more afraid and not so darn inquisitive. When one grownup child stops loving, and the other doesn't, then the other becomes sad, but it's a soft sadness—oh, mu-uch too sad to be angry—and his pride makes him trudge along quietly till he finds another child whom he can love . . . some, anyway. He knows that love's just a fairytale inside of people, and he can't get mad 'cause his sweetheart's fairytale died before his did. He never tries to hit his sweetheart afterwards 'cause . . . children go into sulks, and crying-fits, and titters, but they never really blame each other. Grownup grownups are the only ones who can hold a grudge lo-ong. . . .

Let's see, what a-are the other fairytales of grownup children? Oh, of course . . . sometimes they *think* that they've met another child but he turns out not to be one, and then they fly away from him, after the first night, without believing that they've been "poh-looted and ca-ast into the miyur," like Reverend Warty-Nose used to say at the First Baptist. They leave him because he was ugly and real but he had learned enough children's tricks to fool them for just a little while, and that's not all—when anyone curses them, or hits them, or tries to take them against their wills, he's never really real to them. He's only an ogre, or a dragon, or

a witch in their fairytales, and after they've fought with him, run away from him, they don't even remember that he ever existed. . . .

Sometimes they walk in the country, in the summertime, and the flowers are just mo-obs of eyes on stems, but they're different from human beings because they look without talking, without everlastingly trying to disturb somebody. . . . That's pretty—how did I ever think it up? . . . Sometimes the grownup children make up ideas about their work 'cause they hate it but they can't keep alive without it, and they want to make it seem to be a wee bit lighter. . . . Like funny Elmer —whenever some rich person gives him a quarter tip at the hotel, he always plants it in the geranium pot on the window sill and swears that it's going to grow up into a money-flower—the si-ill'. . . . What e-else—too plummy to stop now. . . . Oh, yes, sometimes they were riding on a tand' byke and it was a train going to—well, some far-off, mysterious place, like New York —but they made the train turn around and go back again 'cause they were homesick, or they'd forgotten something they needed desperately on the trip. . . . Sometimes the moonlight was spilling out of a round pitcher and they were bathing in it and splashing it on each other's faces because it went way down and washed off dirt that water could never reach. . . . Don't I think of the wei-irdest things to-day? . . .

Sometimes they play "My Old Kentucky Home" on a jewsharp and they're roadside violinists, tired and du-usty, and they dare not go back to their southern plantations 'cause they had . . . had . . . oh, yes,

they had "a boyhood escapade there" . . . mmm—that's as spiffy as "affairs of state." . . . I'll change it to "girlhood" and I'll use it when I tell people how I was "driven with sha-ame" out of Chicago at the tender age of seventeen. . . . Don't people love to use words that sound big but haven't got the least meaning to them, whenever anybody does something that they hate 'cause they'd never da-are to do it themselves? . . .

It's close on seven now—time for that cuckoo to oil his throat. . . . Maybe he'll refuse to hop out some day 'cause he'd rather sit back and dream that it's night and he's still in the forest. . . . Oh, hush up, Emmy. . . . "L-l-let me down ea-easy, 'cause I'm coming down amighty ha-ard. L-l-let me down ea-easy, 'cause I'm going to lose my breeches, pa-ard." . . . Drat me, why did I put on that fool record? I'll take it right off—I heard that squishy drummer, Mr. Raffity, singing it . . . where was it? . . . oh, in Taisey's family-entrance, and I can't abide him. Actually sli-iding his fat old knee over when he thought Elmer wasn't paying attention—I certainly got sca-arey when Elm' told him to stop it or take off his coat, but dear me, there's times when fights simply can't be avoided. A grownup child doesn't *want* to fight with his hands, like he did when he was a child not grownup . . . 'cause it's such a poor, cheap way to punish somebody, but sometimes he's forced to fight or else people will take him for a sissy and walk all over him. . . .

Elmer's a peculiar boy—he tries to act so mannish and lumpy to other people, and if I didn't know what a child he was, I'd never care for him a lick. . . . Oh,

well, he's never braggy and raggy even to them—just puts it on 'cause men always turn on another man, quick as a wink, if they think he has the least da-ab of softness in him. Some of them are just a bit soft themselves—if not more—but they believe it ought to come out privately . . . when they're alone with their girls, or when they can't be heard and seen except by somebody whom they trust like holy Moses! . . . "Where was Moses when the light when out? Down in the cellar, eating sauerkraut." . . . When they get together they're dying to act hard, and boasty, and joshy to each other—each one's always watching out to see that the other one doesn't catch *him* in any dreamy nonsense. . . . Aren't men queer?—and yet most of them are so easy to see through 'cause they're always giving away what they're trying to hide, without knowing it. A girl always has a little cleverness in fooling men, no matter how stupid she is—seems to come more natural to her—but most men . . . hhmm . . . they were born with the firm idea that they could pa-aralyze any girl if they wanted to, and they never get over it. . . . Some of them are *snakey,* and they'll do anything to get a party with a girl. Some of them work so hard that they can't be bothered with chasing girls at night, and then they go down to that 391 dump on Harrison Street and buy one—ugh, I can't see what pleasure they get out of tha-at. I can understand it when they shine up to a girl and then leave her for another one—there isn't a thing wrong with that unless they were scheming all the time to get her and then throw her aside . . . but, gosh, on the other hand, any man can

really and truly believe that he's simply wild about a girl until he gets a little tired of kissing and hugging her so mu-uch, and he comes to his senses and finds out that she hasn't got . . . oh, the exact kind of character and ways that fit into his. . . .

I know another thing, too—a girl can nearly always tell whether a man *knew* that he was lying to her, even if she took him anyway 'cause she couldn't resist him. Oh, sure she can, but when she's angry and hurt afterwards, she doesn't want to admit it. I'll never, ne-eve-er be that way—only time I'll ever blame a man is when he uses his brute strength, and tries to make me love him when I don't want to. I know I'm fickle myself, liable to get swept clean off my feet and then wonder how on earth it ever happened—like I did with Ben, and the drummer chap, Billy, and the man from Cal! . . . my . . . I am a card—don't even remember his name! . . . Oh, ye-es, I know—Hal' Crowninshield. . . . Yes, I'm afraid I *am* a fickle one, but I've turned it over in my mind, oh, a hundred times, and I just can't, ca-an't see anything wrong about it. Gosh, if you've made a person happy—even if it's only for a night, or a month, or whatever it is—isn't he better off than if he'd never had you for a single minute? My, if I loved a man to death and I had to choose between having him for just a few days, or not at all, I know what I'd take. . . . People have so much false pride in such things . . . oh, carloads of it . . . and if they're crazy about someone, and they can't believe they're going to have him forever, then they'd rather starve to death. . . .

I guess that's one reason why I love my Elmer—he isn't like that. Whenever I tell him I might always leave him to-morrow, or next month, he just grins sad-like and says a man must be pretty weak if he can't take it between the eyes and still trundle along. I could—I'd *make* myself . . . I guess I love him, too, 'cause he's a dreamer and he's ashamed to confess it sometimes, even to himself. He'll be mopey-dopey for hours and then he'll come out with some remark that only a grownup child could make—something . . . oh, girly, and shrinky, and almost . . . pretty. That's why I decided to live with him: that's why I've loved him for over three months now. . . . Mm. I dread the very thought of meeting new men, 'cause I'm always afraid I might tumble head over heels for one and then I'd have to hurt Elmer. I don't want to hurt him, lord knows, and I won't either, unless I absolutely can't help myself. . . .

Say, where did all of this start from? . . . Whe-ere? . . . Oh, yes—the men who go up to 391 and the other houses here. If they had the least ounce of pride, how could they take a girl who doesn't care a rap of the fingers about them, even for the time being, and just a-acts loving because they're pa-aying her? If I were a man, I'd rather die than snatch somebody who was anxious to get rid of me but didn't dare to show it—that's *real* pride, and not false. . . . And then again, it would be like . . . like owning up that I wasn't attractive enough to find even o-one girl who could care for me for a little while. . . . Oh, I know what the trouble with *those* men is—they're grownups

down to their marrow and all they want is to hug somebody, and they don't care who it is as long as it's a woman. They never *dream* and make fancies, and if they ever marry a girl, I'll bet a-anything it's because she knew how to make them die to have her, and then held them off. . . . That's what girls do when they can't see anything in life except marrying and being respe-ected . . . how often I've heard those words! . . . Yes indeedy, some people might as well be machines for all the re-eal sentiment they've got—like Fred Belanger at the Wellington. . . . The tricky fool . . . I don't believe in remembering rotten times . . . sniveling to myself about how mistreated I was . . . but I'll never forget the afternoon when he banged me around and tried to get the better of me in that coop, just because his arms were stronger. . . . *He* wouldn't have succeeded if I had had to slam a board over his head. I'm peaceful enough except when someone's trying to bully me—then I go bli-ind and there's a reg'lar roaring in my head. . . . He's the only man I've never told Elmer about. I just know Elmer would pick a fight with him and then lose his job, and maybe get arrested. I think he's only waiting for a chance to can poor Elm' too—he's bur-urning with jealousy 'cause Elm' and me fell in love with each other . . . mis'rable world sometimes . . . "hate him 'cause he could and I couldn't." . . . Oh, bosh, Emmy, you go ahead and forget all these real, ugly things. . . . Fairytales are much better. They happen inside of you first and then they look over the things outside —pay no attention to most of them but change just a

fe-ew and make them exactly what you want. Yes, fairytales are lies and you raise them . . . like shields . . . so life can't a-always hit you too hard, 'cause otherwise you'd fall down some day and . . . die.

(Oh, Emmy Lou, let other people call your thoughts and feelings childish sublimations—what does it matter? Their own rationalisms rise halfway to sublimation and then halt—afraid to go on, and too satisfied with themselves, and raising every argument to conceal these reactions.)

Emmy Lou looked at the clock again. Only seven-twelve—how time was dragging. Emmy Lou closed her eyes, more dreaming than awake, and began to remember all of the salient incidents which had happened to her after her arrival in Kalamazoo. She remembered them because she was tired of thinking and they poured effortlessly into the void now within her head.

. . . . . .

The weather was drizzly, with low, puffy, scudding, grayish-black clouds in the sky, and Emmy Lou stood in the railroad-depot at Kalamazoo and wondered what her next move should be. The station was a dismal, gray-stone structure with a slate-ridged roof cone-shaped at both ends, and the moment Emmy Lou noticed it—glistening under the rain, with brown rivulets dropping from its tin water-drains—she felt a damper on her heart-beats. It was so benumbingly gray and small, squatting and practical—might be a symbol of the little, unknown world to which she had fared, and a portent of what was going to befall her.

She had raced down the gangplank at South Haven, with her valises, only a few seconds before the boat's departure—much to the amazement of the officers and bystanders. Then she hid for ten minutes behind a stack of boards on the pier, to make sure that Tom had driven away, after which—puffing, and halting many a time to rest—she carried her valises to the branch-station at the other end of the town. She ignored the hailings of men and women rolling by in buggies and carryalls, because she was afraid that one of them might know the Hiers and report the matter to them, if she accepted a lift. The three-hour ride—on the straight-backed, red plush seat of a train that crawled and stopped at every hint of a village—had stiffened her body and spirit.

As she stood in the station now and received the hard stares of trainmen, and people sitting in the waiting-room, craven impulses started a steady drip-drip in her breast. The people around her were curious at the arrival of a girl—heavily laden and unknown to them—who stood uncertainly near the door of the waiting-room and did not seem to be looking for relatives, friends. They looked at her with patent suspicion, and she became afraid that one of them might call a policeman and have her questioned. The Great Unknown pressed on her, like the coldest of universes: squeezed the breath out of her body and left her just a minimum for life: leered indistinctly at this human gnat facing it, and then turned its back, crushingly unaware of the gnat's motions, needs.

It was never in her to weep—that self-washing of

sorrow, fear, which takes off their dirtiest spots—but an overpowering friendliness to weeping rose halfway to her eyes. Should she send a telegram to her parents and slink back, like a whipped poodle? Was this the end of her poor, little rebellion—snuffed out almost at the beginning because she couldn't cope with an enormous world that might be as unresponsive as the smaller one from which she had scurried? Should she return to her parents with their loud-voiced strictness, their stamping of feet whenever her heart just couldn't help itself and stormed against anyone of their cherished prohibitions—return, and fold her hands, and stuff her mouth with proper pru-unes, and finally marry some dull wet-blanket whom they approved? No, she would kill herself first! . . . "Oh, Emmy . . . stop talking like Lucinda Clayton in *The Great Train Robbery;* 'I will ki-ill myself, John Halloway, if you da-are to touch me with your villainous cla-aws!' Har, har, and a couple more. You'll plunge through a hundred fights and joy-times, and live till you're seventy, and mislay your specs every minute of the day, like Granny Filkins." . . .

It was always so with her. Humor stood behind despondency: controlled itself until the latter attained a peak of intensity: and then sent it sprawling under the impact of fullest revenge.

She noticed a sign above the station-door—"The Wellington Hotel—Modern Conveniences—Spacious, Airy, Clean Rooms—Sample Rooms for Traveling-Men—Rates: One-Fifty and Two Dollars." Fine, she'd get a room there—had two dollars left but

probably wouldn't have to pay in advance—and look for work. She noted the address and walked out of the station. Hack-men began to bark at her, as they leaned on their long whips, but she ignored them and tramped up the steep street, with its cobblestone pavement, two-story brick cages with shops at the bottom. The rain gleamed on her tan summer-cravenette, which extended from tightly clasped throat to ankles and was as shapeless as an upside-down bag with sleeves hanging from it. The rain made the dyes run on her light-colored, pancake straw-hat garlanded with celluloid crab-apples. The rain washed a touch of powder from her face—powder smuggled from a boarder's room at Hiersdale—and kissed her whitish-tan skin into limpidness. The rain slipped down the nape of her neck, tickled her nose, made her long to feel it on all of her naked body now, in spite of an immediate modest slap at the longing—a slap which was in turn slapped by itself and wound up without knowing what had been slapped. Gayety pounded within her—not the optimistic visualizing of a lark but the impact of curiosity and a steeliness light enough to bend without snapping.

As she walked into The Wellington Hotel—winded and bone-tired from the valises—a profound, age-old impudence came to her. These men, the bellboy and the clerk, would never find out that *she* was inexperienced—she would speak few words and act as if the men didn't exist to her. Women were much more difficult to fool—they didn't look at a girl with a vague notion of possible courtship, or with a desire to

impress her with their politeness at first, like men did. They sized each other up more coolly, and half of the time they were just aching to find something wrong. But men, tra la la . . .

The hotel-lobby had a jaundiced spirit—davenports upholstered in buff: arm-chairs yellow-varnished: tall, brass cuspidors on rubber mats; a gilded elevator-cage to the left of the desk. The white tile floor was being mopped by a dejected porter with a rejected savagery on his deflected face. Furtively, he wiped his hand on one of the potted-palms and then seemed to appreciate the sabotage. Emmy Lou grinned too—how she hated potted-palms! Remember—Dickie's joke about Mrs. Potted Palmer? Po-or Di-icksie-Wick. . . .

The clerk, a glossy, half-bald Cyrano in exile, near midde-age, peered up and down at this bundled, be-draggled young woman, who had not rolled up in a cab, but Emmy Lou put on her version of a fine lady bored to saturation.

"Room and bawth, my good chap. Outside ex-po-osure—dear me, ye-es, and hi-igh. I can't sta-and noises."

Fred Berlanger, the clerk, scratched his temple and didn't know whether to laugh or bow. Soaked with rain, two cheap bags, and putting on the airs of Countess Apollinaris—better go slow. One never knew how these mysteries would turn out, and the seeming joke might always prove to be at your expense.

"Yes, yes . . . glad to have you here. And your trunk, Miss?"

"Just here on a trifling visit—couldn't bo-other"—she signed the name Emily in the register, before she realized what she was doing, and then hastily added "Pearson."

Berlanger nodded and was gingerly reflective—he'd seen them prettier, but she was fresh-sweet as a damson, and how she raised those eyebrows! Runaway? Servant-girl on a vacation, filled with Marie Corelli? Student at the U. of Kal', wanting to show her education? Poor one, from some real, old bluebloods? Drifter, out for traveling-men?—nope, too young for that. Berlanger discarded his index—scrawled by that razory shrewdness plus vast ignorance, which is worldly-wisdom—and decided to ticket her as "funny if true" and shine up to her a few hours later. Might be a chance for him. She sounded like a rank imitation but lifted herself with the poise of a silk-stocking—damn hard to imitate the latter.

One of the combination elevator- and bellboys—a tall, reedlike youngster with red hair and a button-nose—chuckled as he carried her valises to the elevator. He'd never heard anyone like her, except in books, but she'd certainly put the Indian sign on old Berlanger and she must be so-omebody. When she threw him a quarter-tip in her room, with the dulcet flourish of a Marie Antoinette lost in one of the pantries of her palace, he became even more convinced and afterwards told the other bellboy downstairs that he was willing to bet a dollar she was an actress for

that Stock Company opening up next week at The Gaiety.

The play went on, crude, uproariously constrained, but somehow carried off by her incisive gracefulness as she sat in the dining-room that evening and then paraded around the lobby. She had changed to a long, ruched, dark green dress, with a resplendent, glass-stone comb stuck in the back of her rolled-up, blonde hair. Her plans were formulated. She had written a letter of recommendation for Miss Pearson and signed it: "Mrs. Mary C. Hervey"—going into a fit of laughter as the latter name occurred to her. The letter testified that Miss Pearson, an orphan of twenty, had "sterling moral habits that simply could not be questioned," and that she had worked a year as a servant-girl for Mrs. Hervey, who regarded her with "respect amounting to affection, if not more." She had been tempted to cross out the "if not more," but she decided that the phrase bestowed a note of touching emphasis. The letter went on to praise Miss Pearson as a "perfectly marvelous worker" and to state that Mrs. Hervey would be glad to answer all communications concerning the matter—Emmy Lou uttered a prayer before she put down the last m in communications, uncertain whether that was the correct spelling. After she secured a job to-morrow, her employer might not take the trouble to write to "Mrs. Hervey's" mythical address—another prayer here.

She sat behind the main bay-window of the lobby and swung a Japanese-paper fan on a near-round, reed frame—the rain had ended and waves of heat

were rising. The hour was eight-thirty and the wide street outside gave itself to a cubistic dusk and shifted the angles of shadows against a crazy-quilt of irregular yellows, grays, and disappearing whites. The endless clacking of horses and the rumbling of wagons and buggies filled the air—punctuated by who-oas, gid-dyaps, whip-cracks, and whinnyings—and the shops on the opposite side of the street, supporting three-story buildings of flat, red-painted brick, glistened tawdrily under gas-lights in transparent glass globes. People strolled by and most of them were unnoisy, even staid, with the exception of the youngest children, for a jazz spirit had not yet permeated the materialisms and relieving sentimentalities of America—that blues-shouting but unblue, inwardly flabby *danse macabre* of tired flesh, where underlings lampoon their welts and overlings drop their whips for a lunatic fling with sex. The commercialism of America, particularly in the Middle West, was replenishing itself with a slower tempo: greed was at a lower pinnacle, much less diversified, and had not yet become so pseudo-sophisticated, rabidly wisecracking. Sex, among droves of people, was more docile, curtsying, resigned to corsets, and morality had not yet learned to put a cigarette against the lipstick and gulp bad gin, while still remaining the old, envious coward.

Sometimes squads of youths, in stiff, thick, oval-topped and -brimmed straw-hats, and baggy suits, passed the hotel-window, singing: "Sweet Adeline," "Because I Love You," and "Molly, My Irish Molly." The hasheesh taken by masses of people is betrayed

by their popular songs, and the transition of America during twenty-seven years is only the swing from "Wait Till The Sun Shines, Nellie" to "Red-Hot Mamma, Twist Your Red-Hot Lips With Me." . . .

As Emmy Lou looked out of the window, she felt peacefully adrift, neither knowing nor caring where she would go. Wasn't it heavenly to be alone: stay out till long past midnight, if she desired: and do and say whatever she pleased? Never mind to-morrow—that was always a bogy-man of some kind. If she were at home now, to-morrow would only mean a string of reprimands dotted by fatherly kisses.

Some of the blades outside, and the traveling-men lounging in the lobby, tried to flirt with her, but she held them off with her high head and the smile which did not seem to see them. Berlanger, relieved from his day-duties, hung around her chair, uncertainly, and then sat down beside her and determined to break the ice, more from perplexity than the hope that he could attract her.

"Nice evening, isn't it?"

"Yes, very."

Short silence.

"Nasty weather we've been having."

"Yes, very."

Short silence.

"Eh, we have an up-to-date hotel here, don't you think?"

"Yes, very."

"It would be a lovely evening for a stroll, uh. . . ."

"Yes, very."

For Christ's sake, couldn't she say anything except "Yes, very"?! She turned and smiled directly at him for the first time, and he felt heartened—maybe she had only been freezing him out to test his persistence. Emboldened, he fondled the points of his brown mustache and asked: "Are you going to stay in Kalamazoo long, Miss . . . uh . . . Pearson?"

"Oh, yes . . . I came here to look for work."

She had clung to her curtness to show him that she wasn't an ordinary flirt, nor an absolutely silent iceberg, and had relented when it occurred to her that this man might be just the one to steer her to some employment. To him, her last words reduced her to a plebeian conundrum, even though they encouraged his hopes, and he regarded her with a slight sneer and more open desire locked on his face.

"Well, you are a whiz—I thought you were a high-up lady."

"What's the matter—don't ladies ever work?"

The question dented his disparaging confidence—"mm, a sharp one to handle."

"Oh, sure—I didn't mean to offend you, not at all, but, uh, you see, you gave me a wrong impression. I thought you were just rolling in money, the way you acted."

She gave him a pitying look. Wasn't it curious? All of these people felt that no one was entitled to act proudly unless he had money.

"Oh, no sir—I always act distant to strange men 'cause I don't think it's wise to encourage them . . .

usually. You're much nicer than most of them, though, so I decided not to be so frosty to you."

The part of him which was a child devouring candy dropped a becoming smirk on his face—"not such a bad girl, at that." She had resolved to give him "a little taffy," much as she disliked it, from the fear that otherwise he might not assist her.

"Say, I'd like to know you better."

"Well, maybe I'll let you . . . maybe . . . if you keep on being nice."

He kissed himself again—a man never knew what was behind ice unless he knew how to chop it.

"That's dandy, Miss Pearson. . . . And say, were you just ragging me when you said you were looking for work?"

"No indeed, Mr . . . uh. . . ."

"Fred Berlanger—that's the monicker. At your service and ready to prove it."

She smiled negligently.

"That's sweet of you. You see, Mr. Berlanger, I'm down to practic'lly nothing and I've *got* to find something to do."

He scented a runaway now and smacked his lips . . . easy pickings in that case.

"That's too bad. If I'm not presuming too much, uh, what kind of work do you do?"

"I've been a servant-girl in Chicago for a year. I worked for a very nice lady there but her husband died and then she broke up housekeeping."

"I see, but how did you happen to come to Kalamazoo, of all places?"

"Well, I had a cousin living here . . . Rebecca Pearson . . . and I thought I'd pay her a visit and look around here."

"I see . . . and what's been the trouble?"

"Well, I hadn't written to her for a year and it turned out that she's moved to Indianapolis! Course, that was the last thing I ever expected . . . so now I'm stranded here. I haven't any parents, you see, and all of my relations are just scattered over the country."

"My, you *are* in a stew, aren't you?"

"Oh, it isn't so terrible—I know I'll find something here. I'd love to live here, too. I hate Chicago 'cause it's so . . . so noisy and unfriendly."

She wondered whether this enforced babbling sounded convincing, and felt disgusted at it—specky lies bothered the straightness of her spirit, but still, wasn't it necessary to utter them to prevent other people from crushing you with bigger ones? She showed him the letter of recommendation, and after he had read it twice his skepticism fled. A runaway of nineteen or twenty would never be clever enough to use such elegant, faultless English and have such a perfect handwriting. Again, she might be twenty or twenty-one—legally old enough to be her own master. Sometimes their looks were amazingly deceptive. She noticed that he was eyeing her hands and smiled slyly to herself—thank goodness, they were red and cracky around the knuckles from that darn slavery in the Hiers kitchen. The hands killed his last flutter of doubt, and as he returned the letter he gave her a

patronizing grin. No one is quite as easy to deceive as a small-fry, self-elevated man-about-town, whether the place be New York or Kalamazoo: the time 1900 or 1930. He can dissect the usual with a cunning accuracy, but whenever he is confronted by anything, anybody, even slightly unusual, his wits fail him.

"You certainly had me buffaloed for a while. I thought you were either in the upper crust or ma-amma was hunting to lug you back home."

"No, I'm not lucky enough to have a mother."

A pause.

"I hate to be so forward, Mr. Berlanger, but don't you think you might be able to find some work for me? I'm down to just a little change in my pocket-book, and really, it makes me awf'lly nervous."

He became more naturally friendly now, and the slicy stare left his brown eyes—why not be generous to one of his own sort: a working-class dub? Besides, his kindness might pave the road to a bunch of luscious spooning. He still felt the veriest touch of resentment at her former costume-party, but . . . lord . . . he tried to play the grand gentleman himself, sometimes. It was bad enough to be a flunky without always acting like one, and she certainly had put over her part with the grace of a Lady Vere De Ve-ere, even if she hadn't known the language of such a person. It just went to show that poor, low-born girls were often the equals of upper ones and only lacked the latter's advantages and education.

"Sure I can—we need another chambermaid here,

and I'll take it up with the head to-morrow morning. And don't worry about it either—my say goes!"

"Oh, gee, that'll be just what I want. I'm awf'lly grateful to you."

"Oh, bosh . . . it's nothing at all. I'm just giving you a chance to work your back out, like we all have to do. . . . Besides, I think you're a darn good sort and I'm beginning to take a shine to you."

"Oh, I'll bet you're just sa-aying that."

In her delight at having secured a job, she inspected him less sharply, and her moderate instincts against him were gagged by the necessity for cajoling him, distasteful as it was, since her position was still none too secure.

"No siree. You did have me mad for a while with that lady-act of yours, but, oh . . . let's forget it. I guess I can take a joke as well as the next man!"

"I'm awf'lly sorry about it now. I just wanted to see if I could get away with it and fool people. . . . Won't you forgive me?"

"Certainly, ce-ertainly . . . it's not worth talking about."

A short silence.

"Say, Miss Pearson, I feel sort of shy about mentioning it, but, uh . . . if you need a dollar or two I'd be only too glad to loan it to you."

She made a conventional dissent—it wouldn't do to let him become too fast with such familiarities—and then she asked: "Are there any servants' rooms here in the hotel?"

"Nope, but I know a jim-dandy rooming-house on

Saunders Street and it's cheap as dirt. I'll tell the landlady to-morrow morning, before I come down to work, and you can move in to-morrow night. You'll get your meals here with the help, so you won't have another thing to worry about."

She uttered another expression of thanks and they veered into short snatches of silence and small-talk, with Berlanger fluently attempting to put his best foot forward as a kindly Lothario, who could nevertheless become a "reg'lar devil of a cutup" if the woman displayed any distinct liking for him. He tried to sound out her willingness but she assumed an innocent sweetness which he could not pierce, and yawned beneath it. She felt so sleepy and emotionless after her tensely varied day—lordie, but couldn't a girl change her whole lifetime in the space between dawns? And this man here, he wanted a petting-match . . . guess most of them did, no matter who the girl was, but . . . she hated pointed, waxy mustaches! Men who wasted all that time to spike and prettify their precious faces weren't apt to have much below them! Shaving, now, was different—kept a man from having a long whisk-broom that jerked when he spoke, and then he didn't brush off a girl's face when he kissed her. Again, this Berlanger man talked just like ten others she had heard—no dreams, and little facts about where they lived, and, oh, a kind of respectful but boldly hinting "invite." She hadn't had much of it addressed to herself, except from Ben and . . . that dirty thing, Klober . . . but she had listened to the dudes at Hiersdale as they tried to spark with the girl-boarders there,

and even high-school lads had offered this conversational method to her, in a much more diffident way. Course, she didn't object to babbling, when it was straight and really funny—everybody couldn't be serious and pick their words all the time—but she couldn't bear all of this polite hiding and fuzzy-wuzzy chatter, with here and there a little hint to show what the ge-entleman was really interested in.

Berlanger brought her a glass of ice-tea, and then she continued to converse with him because her throat had been parched and she felt a compulsory gratitude. At the same time she was still afraid to threaten the first promise of independence which her young life had known. He considered that he had made sufficient headway to risk a more direct attitude. She was undoubtedly an innocent one—re-easonably innocent, at least—but if he took her for a buggy-ride, he might secure a few harmless, honey-dipped kisses, and, well—you never knew. He had worked like a nigger handling that Grange Convention to-day and he deserved a bunch of sweet. She didn't seem to be a pullet who could be rushed off her feet but she was a good-looker and had poise to spa-are, and a pert plainness to her speech, which became softly perplexed when he tried to become bolder. Most of them beat around the bush till a man could have whacked them from sheer disgust, and this one was certainly a relief! Yes sir, it would be worth while to court her for quite a time, if she didn't tumble promptly, and then when she did become fond of him, he could pat himself on the back. A man became so tired of this endless north- and south-pole

line-up—they were either stubbornly chilly, and a man couldn't get within a mile of them, or else they came across right off the bat and made a fellow wonder whether he was number ten or twenty-six. This Pearson lass might be the lively medium which he needed—a girl who could make him respect her, and congratulate himself when he finally induced her. Sure looked fetching, with that straight, little nose and those blue eyes under the bushel of blonde hair. Maybe he would really go head over heels for her and wind up by making a decent proposal to her—it wasn't in the cards that he would remain a bachelor forever. Oh, ra-ats . . . starting in to rave over a pick-up scarcely more than an hour old. If he wasn't the most sentimental cuss in seven states, then nobody was! . . .

"Say, how about going for a little ride, Miss Pearson?"

A pause.

"Come on, will you? I can hire a rig in a jif'—the stable's right in the next block. I'll get a daisy two-seater and we'll eat up the roads and take in the scen'ry for a while. . . . It's really a shame to stay in on a night like this!"

She remained silent, but his confidence did not lessen—of course, a rather inexperienced girl, who wasn't forward, would want a man to coax her before she went riding with him on first acquaintance.

"Listen, you needn't be afraid of me-e—I'm not a hoodlum when it comes to women. Never was. . . . You say yes now and we'll have a dandy ride! I'm

a top-notch driver too, and I'll pick out a good, quiet nag, don't you fear."

She had been silent from the dread that she might antagonize him, if she refused his invitation, and because she had no desire to accompany him. Oh, some more prittle-prattle and then he'd try to kiss her a few times—what for? She'd simply have to say no, and he could keep his darn job too, if he didn't like it. Her company and her kisses weren't going to be auctioned off for any job on earth, no matter what came as the result of this refusal. Her previous parrying compliances had rested illy upon her shoulders and the old uncompromising independence could not be held down entirely. No, she wouldn't go but she *would* be a li-ittle tactful. . . . After all, he hadn't advanced anything definitely obnoxious, except the not-quite-naughty courting that seemed to be natural to most men, and he *had* been kind in agreeing to help her.

"I'm just too tired to breathe—I had a long trip on the train to-day and I didn't rest a wink this afternoon. You'll just *have* to excuse me, Mr. Berlanger."

"Oh, come on—just for half an hour, won't you?"

"No, not to-night . . . ple-ease. We'll go some other night when I'm not so yawny."

Oh, Lord, she hoped that he wouldn't keep it up now—she'd lose her temper then, and ask him why he didn't know what the word no-o meant, and then all her prospects would explode. After her last words, she dropped her hands on his for a moment—it was actually a smile of touch beseeching him not to make

her angry, but he confused it with one of budding, shyly prodded approval. . . .

The Lilliputian-pagan—who fights daily with his conscience and imagines that susceptible women have forced him to become an unclean Gulliver—is easily circumvented by any woman because his vanity refuses to allow his hard shrewdness to pass beyond a moderate degree of protective insight. Such men—miscalled libertines—are only innate moralists forever losing their endurance and weeping over it; forever unable to extract a morsel of beauty or conviction from the appetites within, which ambush the moralist at regular intervals. . . .

As Berlanger escorted Emmy Lou to the elevator, he stroked his memory into retirement and felt incalculably less smudged, more forbearing, than most of the other town-blades whom he knew. Say, if he had insisted and taken her out to-night, he might have lost control over himself and overpowered this poor, sweet, clean-tongued thing, and that would have been a damn shame too—no need to hurry the poor girl, like a starved bear in the cave, and again, he might have shocked the life out of her trusting, admiring innocence. Mighty few men knew how to hold themselves back, when the girl seemed to be inexperienced and indicated how much she liked them, but *he* was different. He wasn't so defeated that he had to trot out his whole satchel of tricks on the very first night!

He squeezed her hand and tried to look both fatherly and desirous, as he said "good night"—an expression which placed an undue strain on his jutting-out nose

and upper lip—and she gave him a last, forced smile and checked an incipient yawn with great effort. Thank heaven this nonsense was over—her throat was positively so-ore from throwing out one hundred assorted bonbons, and she wasn't accustomed to blabbing at length to any man unless he attracted her. Berlanger wasn't repulsive to her but just, oh, namby-pa-amby, and too squirmy in regard to expressing his real desires, opinions. . . . "Guess, you're the best I've seen yet . . . poor Dickie boy—poor, ill-treated, stuttery-dear Dickie boy." . . .

And thus commenced her period of servitude at The Wellington Hotel. Each chambermaid was assigned an entire floor of twelve rooms in the five-story hotel and expected to keep it scrupulously clean. A supervisor ordered the maids and attended to the distribution of the linens—Kate Gregory, a parrakeet with a prodigiously curving-out nose, infinitely receding chin, and draggy, dark green skirts in place of the missing tail. Her tongue never halted, and her soul was indecent to the point which men call virtue. She hated Emmy Lou without quite knowing why—the girl kept her mouth shut and worked like a horse but she had a disrespectful, too-wise look in her eyes. Couldn't bounce her as long as she didn't lag, and obeyed instructions, but—"wait till that a-article did the least thing offensive!"

Emmy Lou regarded Kate with the barest of aversions. Her private life couldn't be touched by this fault-finding, brass-lunged woman, and from now on, "if anyone could pluck the cotton-wool out of *her*

ears, they'd have to be good!" If she didn't allow people to bully her in her work, she would have to slouch back to people who would bully all of her life. Work was nasty and profitless, no matter how you took it—just an expensively dredging payment that you had to make for being able to remain alive, to dream and love a little in a world which, as far as she was beginning to see, was not ruled by dreams, or love . . . for the most part. Perhaps even Kate Gregory was a poisony scold because she abominated her job but couldn't leave it. She had heard the maids saying that Kate took care of an invalid brother, who cost her a pretty penny . . . gloom, gloom . . . take a broom . . . sweep it out and light the room. . . . Plod along, plod along . . . never mind the rasping. . . . He'll ride in upon a song . . . warmed by fingers clasping. . . .

Yes, Emmy Lou, be sentimental—clearly, wanly sentimental. Defiances and dawning insights must close their eyes and smile hopefully, sometimes, since otherwise the play would grow too black, the actors become too grossly self-desecrating. You are far better than the men who sell an invented, multiplied sentimentality to hungry mites and wax rich upon it. . . .

Emmy Lou tabulated the other three maids with the pity of one who shared their surface ranklings and treadmills but could not join their spirit—Harriet was a cross-patch near to murder because she loved a drunkard who stole her money and spat upon her, when not chucking her under the chin as the prelude to another financial raid. Lucille was so old and broken down that she scarcely dared to whisper lest she lose

her job. Ruth was dumb and flighty, and mad about anyone under forty who wore trousers, but she tried to snicker at all of her slaps and lacks, and she made an endurable companion clung to for want of a better one.

After two weeks passed—gruelling and sweaty for her slim body—Emmy Lou mastered the knack of throwing sheets across a bed with one movement, and tucking white spreads in under the pillows with a second, and dusting without jerking her arms off. Many a time, with her clothes sticking to her bosom like extra layers of wet skin, she longed to surrender and return to straitjackets, handcuffs, and gags. Many a time, with a dull pain at the top of her spine, she could scarcely restrain herself from walking out of the hotel . . . home, anywhere, just for a few hours of heaven-soaked rest. Many a time, with Kate's voice slashing her ears, she was on the verge of throwing back contemptuous words and dashing out to anything that could promise to save her from grinding and abuse.

An enormous pride withheld her at every extremity, laughed the situation into smallness. "Millions of girls have to take this very same straining and fretting every day of their lives—you any weaker than they are? Breaking your back isn't half as bad as letting people break into your heart and tell you what ought to be there, and lock you up whenever you *shock* them. 'Bout the only thing that doesn't shock them is their own pure, scratchy cussedness. Better not let me hear any more whines from *you*."

The hallway-mopping and bathtub-scrubbing pulled at her body the most, but she fell into the habit of whistling a tune under her breath and moving her arms to the rhythm of it, and then she imagined that she was a band-leader, standing on a platform of emotion and bending down of her own free will to direct the musicians far below. . . . Berlanger still pursued her, but she had devised a system for avoiding and soothing him —his attentions were meaningless except that they invaded the monotony of her life and prevented her from feeling utterly sexless, unwanted. She fled through the back-entrance of the hotel immediately after supper: hid within some empty room whenever he was on her floor: and treated him with a shy sobriety when she couldn't escape. She had gone buggy-riding with him, during the first week, just to interrupt the drudgery of her days, and had spent most of the time warding off his embraces and listening to his remarks about the glorious evening, and the perfume of real romance in the air, and how could she resist them? It was leagues away from her idea of romance, where two people defied an unfriendly world, and used every shade of soft fancy to ignore it, and . . . and were breathlessly tied together by, oh, a sad happiness that kissed its past wounds to sleep and yet preserved the touch of them on its lips—the space between a sigh and a silent laugh. If that perfume Berlanger was always talking about was anything like the one he used on his mustache-points, then his kind of romance smelled too strong for her. Still he was never rough, and always handing her desperate compliments, and maybe he *did* have a

deep feeling for her, though she doubted whether it was more than a desire to cuddle close for a while. She had been born wise in the cradle, in the ability to judge men's emotions, and flowery ejaculations meant nothing to her unless they were accompanied by a certain undercurrent of despair in the voice which uttered them, and a spontaneity whose words could never be quite prophesied. Even with Hervey she had snatched at a hope while warnings still muttered in her heart.

Berlanger regarded her now as an unassuming virgin just canny enough to hold out deliberately for marriage, and sometimes his protesting conscience induced him to leave her in peace for a day or two—it was justifiable to take a girl who knew the ropes, to a fair extent anyway, and had nothing precious to lose, but an entirely innocent one, uncoquettish as well, made a man sit down and think it over! Such a girl might wind up with a smashed heart and hate the man who had robbed her and destroyed her trust, and no man except an out-and-out rotter cared to have too many of such accusations on his mind! Yes, he had broken loose before, in spite of his fine talk, but he was none too proud of it . . . this continual scrap between a fellow's decent reluctance, and desires, was a humdinger sure enough, and it never seemed to be solved! At other times he called himself an overscrupulous jackass and swore that he would "corner this slippery wench or know the reason why!"

Emmy Lou had ceased to fear detection and capture from another source, because of an incident which had happened during her first week at the hotel. She had

gone to the basement for a box of laundry-soap and was returning with her burden when she noticed a policeman standing in front of the lobby-desk and talking. She stopped to listen. The policeman was a tall, ratty-faced man, clad in a high, gray helmet with a short, down-slanting brim: a dark blue, brass-buttoned uniform: and a narrow belt at the waist, from which his club hung. As she looked at him, he became the officious, calloused, flatfooted symbol of a world of disagreeable reality, which she was beginning to fathom—the flunky-messenger, who was ordered to make no distinction between actual criminals and people whose hearts wanted to be free. Her feeling was unable to shape the foregoing words, of course, and yet it drew poignantly near to their indistinct presence. The policeman's voice rang flatly: "Say, we just got a wire from Chi' in a missing-girl case. The dame disappeared off the boat going from South Haven to Chi' and they don't figger it's a suicide case 'cause some people claim they saw her ducking away, just before the boat sailed."

Berlanger pricked up his ears and the faint suspicion that Emmy Lou might be a runaway returned to him.

"What's her description, Tom?" he asked.

The policeman consulted a black notebook.

"Wait a minute, I got it right here. Here it is. . . . Louise Filkins . . . tall, slim, and long, black hair."

"Did you say her hair was *black?*"

"Yep, black. That's the way we got it."

Berlanger laughed to himself—he should have known that there was no connection between this case and

Emily. He could size up anyone quicker than a grease-slip and he was rarely fooled!

"Nobody here by that description, Tom, 'cept a couple of hens with a string tied to their roosters."

The policeman chuckled— "No hen mixed up in this case. I'm looking for a single brunette, Fred."

"Well, there's Maggie Flanner, the dishwasher here. She's got black hair . . . black's the ace . . . and she's not a day over forty-two. Maybe you'd like her."

The policeman laughed. . . . "No, thanks—thirty-five's the limit with me! . . . Well, I guess I'll be mosying, Fred. So long."

"So long."

As Emmy Lou rode upstairs, in the servants- and baggage-elevator in the rear, she had a nightingale outburst in her heart. Saved by an incomplete name and an error concerning hair—wasn't that sheer, dumb luck? Then she shivered for a moment as she realized how close she had been to exposure—it had been like a fingertip swinging past a house of cards and missing it by the fraction of an inch. But the house was unthreatened now and magically restored to solidness—she was free to go her way, unbothered by anybody! Wasn't that just too creamy-peachy for words?

Afterwards, however, as she strode through the slavery of her day, a film of darkness crept back. Her parents might really believe that she had jumped off the boat, or imagine that something horrible had befallen her. Shouldn't she drop them a note and tell them that she was unharmed, and beg them not to disturb her? . . . In the process of adjusting herself to new

surroundings, absorbing new wisdoms, and grappling with manual labor, her parents had receded to sputtering myths, but now their faces became once more clear and accusing. The old, miserable, pity-haunted conflict between two kinds of selfishness came back to her. The first brand craved that peace of mind which sprang from the knowledge that other people had not been mortally hurt, and feared that its desire would always be darkened and hindered by their pain, and wondered whether it would not be happier if it killed this desire and accepted the happiness of others as a substitute. The second brand made a solitary, pain-trampling decision and saw no reason for allowing other people's prejudices and gabardines to interfere with it, and believed that the wounds of these others were not real, in an ultimate sense, but only camouflages, exhibited by their self-importance to prevent itself from collapsing.

Emmy Lou fought it out, hour after hour, as she swung her arms through different tasks. Her mother's face was as unappealing as a dummy, and even the tears on it seemed to be emotional glycerine, but she could see her father's thickly drooping lips and the deepening furrows between his eyes and just above his nose, and hear the torment of his voice. Poor, glum, panicky father, always coming back to that favorite phrase of his, "pla-ain, swee-et decency"—with a look in his blue eyes that said silently: "Oh, I know—it's not so *terribly* sweet, but it must be obeyed just the same." . . . Lordie, how difficult it was to know what was actually right—a pair of blue eyes pulled her in

one direction and the pumping of her own steady-clear heart drove her into the other.

Toward the end of the afternoon, however, an iron conviction began to form in her heart, rising painfully but solidly, tier on tier, like the skeleton of a skyscraper that was destined never to fall. The conviction was far more final than the one wrung out in the barn at Hiersdale because it was more fortified by new experiences, new glimpses into the inner workings of men and women, and the accomplished fact of physical liberation. "Oh, you wouldn't make other people happy by striking your heart and stuffing a gag in your mouth—never, never. Your own unhappiness would always jump out sometime—try as you might to hold it down—and they would always feel that it was pointing a finger at them, and bitterly reproach themselves for having spoiled your longing without making their own lives happier!" No, her parents would have to suffer now and recover later on, if they could. Otherwise, she would torture both herself and them in the end. It was a cruel situation to her, but it seemed to be an outside law made by God, or some kind of tyranny behind life—a law for which she was not responsible.

When she returned to her room that night, her heart was sad but composed, and she decided to drop the fight once and for all. Any further brooding about it would only lead to the same conclusion—that was established beyond the twitch of a doubt. She was so sturdily young, so tinkle-tingly and tiptoey with dreams of compensating adventures and still-deferred

loves, and the desire to plow through all the toils and violences of life and harden herself till they were powerless to cut her, and somehow arrive at refuges of colossal delight scattered along the road, however brief they might be. When her head pressed against the pillow that night, the unassailable, inexplicable, elasticity of youth was once more in her heart—warbling, skipping, flying over mile-high obstacles. . . .

When she was entering her fourth week at the hotel, an experience plopped out of a clear sky and introduced her to another phase in the reality of street-level life—the viciousness of pygmy-pagans become primitively ablaze, who can see nothing for a time save the closely taunting form of a woman and feel nothing except the blood-crazy desire to force her into submission. It was late in the afternoon and she had been sent to the basement-storehouse for a new mop. As she picked her way through the coal-dusty, box-littered, stone-cement region, dimly lit by gas jets, she caught sight of Berlanger. He had ordered one of the bellboys to relieve him behind the desk and had gone down to question McManus, the janitor, concerning complaints over a lack of hot water in the guest-rooms. Questioning an outgoing plumber, who had just finished a job in the basement, he discovered that McManus had disappeared on an "errand" and would not return for an hour—"more likely ducked over to Taisey's to wet his whistle, the old sot." Berlanger had left a note of reprimand in the wooden structure near the furnace, where the janitor slept. He emerged from this coop just as Emmy Lou was

walking toward it, and stood in front of her, compelling her to halt.

"Hey, where d'you think you're going, Em' "—he tried to be jocose but a shiver took him as he looked at her small, chintz-warm face with stringlets of blonde hair falling over the forehead.

God, what a pippin she was. . . . God, he just couldn't keep his hands off her.

They were alone now with practically no chance of being disturbed, and damned if the situation wasn't too dazzling-sweet to be neglected.

"I'm going for a mop. You trot along now, Fred —Kate'll tear my head off if I don't get back."

"That's all right, I'll ki-iss it off first and then you won't have one!"

He hugged her to him with his right arm and his left hand was under her chin and tried to turn her head within reach of his mouth. Her arms were criss-crossed against his breast, as she sought to push him away. She felt only a fleck of resentment now—a man couldn't be blamed if he was crazy to kiss a girl, and if he wasn't too rough, and the girl responded, or did her best to avoid it, according to how much she liked him. Bosh and prune-juice . . . half the time, when girls slapped a man's face, or burned him to a crisp, they were only trying to tell themselves how exqui-isite and spotless they were. Darn few fellows that couldn't be handled quietly, if a girl was firm and not teasing them. Just the same, Berlanger was becoming too insistent, and she would have to make him stop, quietly but definitely. She needed

all of her strength for working and she couldn't afford to waste any of it pushing *him* off all the time.

She averted her head persistently and said: "Leave me alone, Fred! . . . I don't want to be kissed . . . I mean it!"

"Oh, come on, Emmy . . . I won't poison you."

"I *don't* want to be kissed! I don't! . . . Let me go, Fred . . . ple-ease."

At this moment, a sulphuric crackling broke through Berlanger's heart—broke through the rows of moral statuettes chipped and sullied but somehow preserved by fear. The rubbing of her breast against his, as she fought to free herself: the grazing of her legs and hips: the screening silence and darkness of the basement—all combined to madden and liberate his emotions. He was no longer a servile, maneuvering, self-pinioned hotel-clerk, secretly running to women whom he regarded as strumpets and accepting them because he could find no other release. He became a spontaneous giant to himself—a man who had leaped from the cautious, humdrum lowlands of desire and was fighting in those clouds to which he usually craned his neck . . . fighting to capture a fresh, untouched, blossomy-haired, glory-eyed girl and win a unique esteem and joy, far removed from common orgies with "common" women. He raised Emmy Lou in his arms, carried her into the coop, and dropped her on the cot where McManus slept. The suddenness of these movements, and his superior strength exerted to the utmost, prevented her from resisting them. She was neither enraged nor frightened, but a cold disgust possessed

her—this *fool,* thinking he could make her do something against her will! Even if he fought with her till she was too weak to hold him off—what pleasure could he get from taking a girl who didn't want him but had to give up because his muscles were stronger? The poor, common, stupid thing—going clean out of his senses and fighting with his arms and legs for a love that wasn't there! She had heard of such men, vaguely, but now she knew that they really existed—all that *they* wanted was a woman's body, and they were willing to beat her down if they couldn't get it any other way! . . .

She wasted no words but used all of her energies in the effort to repel him. The struggle became ugly now, pathetically ugly, for Berlanger had killed all of his daytime discretions and was mauling her, wrenching her arms to her sides, and mumbling a childish jumble of curses and endearments. She decided to spring a ruse to obtain her freedom—she was becoming more and more breathlessly weak and she would have to use her wits in place of her arms and knees. She made her body limp and allowed him to hug her close for a few seconds, and then whispered: "Listen . . . Fred, darling . . . I'll let you, honest I will, but you go out first and make sure nobody's coming . . . I'm so afraid we'll be caught. . . . Go on, darling. . . ."

Delighted at the darlings and the unexpected promise of submission, he jumped to his feet, walked quickly out of the coop, and then stood, peering around in the darkness. She rose also, and crept to the opening in

the wooden partition, after which she turned abruptly and made a dash for the alley-exit of the basement. He chased her but halted after she had banged the door behind her, not daring to follow her outside. Standing among the ashcans and garbage-pails in the alley, she made a hasty effort to bring a semblance of order to her dress and hair, and then she walked around and entered the lobby. She stopped in front of the elevator, indecisively. She hadn't secured the mop, and Kate would mu-urder her, since she wasn't a tell-tale and just couldn't explain why she had been delayed. At that moment Berlanger appeared, frowning stiffly and avoiding her eyes.

His first reactions had been those of bewilderment succeeded by a rage against both Emmy Lou and his own gullibility—the rage of a cheated animal, stripped of its dream of grand, unusual escape and reduced to a small, breathless, ruffled creature standing alone in a squalid basement. Now, however, he felt frightened, heavy, self-accusing, despite the painful sneer at the entire episode which he tried to summon—this cunning, dippy, lying man-teaser would undoubtedly lodge a complaint against him. She was just that kind! . . . Then he'd be in a pretty pickle indeed! Well, he'd have to use his influence with the coppers and lie his way out of it . . . somehow. Christ, he was disgusted with himself, and her, and the whole caboodle. . . . He knew plenty of girls who were procurable and yet he had gone and plunged himself into a peck of trouble over a tricky, snippy she-cat! Time to have his head examined! . . .

After she had returned to the basement and secured the mop, Emmy Lou hurried back to her floor. Though she was still nerve-shaken by the feeling of an ugly revelation, Berlanger had vanished from her conscious mind and she was actively concerned only with the possibility that Kate might "fly into a holy fit" and discharge her. She breathed a sigh of relief as she discovered that Kate was still standing in the doorway of Room 311 and gabbing with that fat, long-nosed Mrs. Cupperson, who was descanting on the brilliance of her family-connections in Chicago, and the wonderful mansion she had owned before her husband lost his business in the war-panic. Bless the snobby, stingy thing—talking for forty minutes now and still going strong! "Now I can forgive her for making me crawl under the bed the other morning and clean the springs!"

Afterwards, as she mopped the hallway-floor, Berlanger returned to her mind and she shrank away from the still fresh and close memory of his pawing hands and pressing knees in "that dirty basement," which became a veritable, dank pit for the undressed motives of men. The revulsion could not survive. She was too innately honest to build up a vanity-struck anger and pat it with expletives: too innately fair to picture him as the Wolf, with herself posing as Little Red Riding-Hood before the intangible photographers: and too immensely self-questioning and self-indifferent by turns to find any need for railing or ranting at anyone unless the person seemed to be *deliberately* cruel, consciously hypocritical. Her pride was mea-

sureless but it assailed pettiness more than violence: squirming more than directness: lies more than truthful nakedness, no matter how obnoxious this nakedness might be to her own selection. Berlanger had lost his head: had been a darn sight more sincere, more worthy of respect this afternoon, in spite of the ugliness which had accompanied his outburst. The only actual pleasure to him, the only end that made life promising, was a girl's body, but he couldn't be blamed for that any more than she could be blamed for hating such a contact when it was void of silly-dear dreams and communions and tender consents. He had wanted her so much, so insanely, that he had refused to see or accept her own aversion to him, and he hadn't realized the ugliness of his actions, and she wasn't so all-fired blameless herself. She had flattered him at first to obtain the job, and allowed him to kiss her twice during the buggy-ride three days later, and pretended to be coy and unaware of his longings afterwards, while still treating him with a certain friendliness. Men like him wouldn't permit themselves to be sure that a girl didn't care for them, unless she made it plain at the very start—they fed on the least encouragement. . . . No, she didn't hate him and even pitied him, but she would have to make it clear to him that he would not be allowed to throw her around: that she wasn't a girl who could be bullied into letting a man do everything to her.

That evening, as they both sat on opposite sides of the supper-table—in the serving-pantry where the help ate—she looked at him with a sober forgiveness which

he misinterpreted. He thought that she was trying to stare him out of countenance with the contempt of a self-whitewashed coquette, and he felt unendurably irritated and yet dared not reveal it. He expected her to denounce him at any moment and resolved to brazen it out with a cold silence: bolt his food: and hurry away.

The others were doubling up with laughter at the expense of a newcomer—a ruddy-cheeked, abashed boy who had been hired as a porter that day. The boy, Joe Paisley, had asked for a napkin—an unprecedented request in this social circle—and the others were bursting over with annoyance and derision at this fussy elegance.

"So, you want a na-apki-in, do you? Well, well, come to think of it . . . I didn't heat your plate to-night, and jimminy . . . I forgot to put the parsley on your steak! I don't know wha-at came over me" —Jimmy, the fat, middle-aged, first-cook, released a peal of laughter, in which the others joined, with the exception of Emmy Lou, who smiled, and Berlanger, who made an effort to snort and failed miserably.

"Say, these kitchen-chairs are kinda ha-ard—let's get him one from the dining-room"—Ruth, a short, palely dumpy girl, stood up, as though to carry out her words, and the laughter rose again.

"What did yez say yez name was?"—Kate leaned forward and scowled at the offender.

"Paisley . . . Joe Paisley, ma'm"—the boy flushed, and fidgeted on his seat.

"We-ell now, 'tis a foine stroke of luck yez are

going to have! I've got a noice Paisley shawl at home and I'll bring it down f'r yez to-morra morning!"

This remark was considered to be the main gun of the witty fusillade, and it was greeted by a prolonged howl of laughter. If the lad had bandied words with his tormenters, he would have engendered an implacable, future hostility, but after he finally grinned contritely at the end of his long silence, he was excused as a softy who hadn't known any better. Emmy Lou smiled reminiscently—"remember how they had slammed her on her first day because they had noticed that she was sipping her soup from the side of the spoon?" It was their way of initiating anyone who differed in the slightest from their habits and dislikes—the devilment with which they "took it out" on the higher-ups in the dining-room and upstairs. They hated to fetch and carry for these luckier people and yet they couldn't get back at *them,* so they pounced upon any new worker who showed even a trace of the manners and talk advanced by the actual targets. No, she would never be a real part of these scoffers at the supper-table but she understood them: sympathized with them when they weren't jealously tearing each other to pieces: and had learned to hide herself from them, holding them at arm's length. None of the foregoing words were definitely in her head but her thoughts stumbled patiently toward them.

After Berlanger had gulped his coffee and hastened from the table, Emmy Lou followed and caught up to him on the street. They stood beside the wooden Indian of a cigar-store, a few paces from the hotel, and

Berlanger's body was as stiff as the Indian's, and filled with moody trepidations.

"I want to talk to you, Fred," she repeated.

"Well, go ahead—shoot. I suppose you'll tell the coppers on me, or else you'll hand out a long story to Higginboth' and try to get me canned. I know your kind."

During that moment his ugliness came back, but she pushed it aside—he was such a sly one himself that he couldn't believe that anyone else could be different!

"I'm *not* a pe-eacher and I never was. You're so darn mean most of the time you think everybody else is."

"Well, what d'you want then?"—his face was torn between doubt and surprise.

"I want you to leave me alone from now on. Don't you ever da-are to lay a hand on me again."

Short silence.

"You were a nasty brute this afternoon, but you went clean off your mind and you couldn't help yourself."

A pause.

"I'm ready to be friends with you, Fred, 'cause I never hold a grudge, but I'll never go out with you again and you'll have to promise never, never to touch me again!"

He was dazed at these lenient but firm words, from a girl whom he had choked, hit, and bitten only a few hours previous—a girl who, obviously, wasn't frightened either.

"Say, let me get this straight—you're willing to be fri-iends with me and forget the whole thing?"—his voice was incredulous.

"Sure I am, but you've got to get one thing in your head—I'm not in love with you and I won't stand for being mauled around! All you want is a party with a gi-irl, but you'll never have me, Fred . . . ne-eve-er. You might as well stop trying."

He returned to peevishness for a moment.

"Well, you *were* leading me on, Em'—I wasn't entirely to blame and you know it."

"Oh, I know you weren't, Fred. I shouldn't have let you kiss me when we went riding that night. I was crazy to keep the job and I was afraid you'd turn against me."

"Sa-ay, a girl doesn't have to blarney *me* all over the map before *I'll* help her—I'm not that kind of a fellow!"

"Maybe you're not, Fred, but I didn't know."

"Well, you know it no-ow."

A pause.

"All right then. We'll be friends, Fred, and we'll talk nice and sweet to each other, but . . . that's all. If I ever fall in love with you, I'll tell you myself . . . you won't have to ju-ump on me in a dark, old basement! . . . Is that a go?"

"Sure is! I think you're a crackerjack, Em', and I'm going to toe the mark with you from now on!"

She departed a minute later and he stared after her with a purified respect in his bulgy brown eyes, and his lips widely parted. The first beauty that his life

had ever extracted from a woman sifted through his heart, lifted it—evanescently—a foot above the pavement. It was far more potent than the one emanating from the creaky, platitudinous shrine where he had always ensconced his mother, for it had not been partially thrust upon him by surrounding dictations. What a remarkably *decent* girl Emmy Lou was—not in the usual sense of the word but in her way of treating people! A fine, straight pal through and through, and the first girl who had ever made him utterly ashamed of anything he had done. After all, he had jumped on her, like a dog, and she would have been able to plunge him into hot water galore, but she passed it by, had shaken hands with him. Why? Not because she was afraid of him, or setting her cap for him with a kind of meek prudishness, but because she had . . . oh, a kind of fine, live-and-let-live understanding. Yes, she was worth a bushel of the women he knew and if she ever gave him a chance to retrieve himself, he'd marry her in a minute.

. . . . . .

The next few months strengthened Emmy Lou's body as well as her mind. Autumn stripped itself to winter and winter dissolved into spring, and these seasonal changes also symbolized the broader alterations in her spirit. The mellow understanding wrung from her clawing-match with Berlanger wore itself out and was replaced by a long, cold hardness toward men, in which all of their words seemed to be trifling shifts in a dispiriting game of hide-and-go-seek, and all of their

actions converged to a surprising similarity, on a second inspection. She was tramping through a first desolation brought by scores of hoary disillusionments new to her spirit, and the revelation that the world held so many backbiting, dull, and underhanded people, made her lock up her heart for a time and wonder whether she was destined for future intimacies with *anybody*. Her deviations with two men during this winter of the heart —Billy and Hal'—had been caused by her efforts to thaw out the cold loneliness which often made her life seem to be only a succession of working-days separated by empty nights! The flexibility of her youth, temporarily under a pall, had tried to coax love out of its hiding place—a more mature crescendo of the awakening that she had felt with Dick—since without love, life was only sapless days of toil, with jailed fancies glinting in the interims. Her one-night experiences with each of these men failed because the physical attractiveness of the men stood alone and insufficient on the following morning—faces still handsome but releasing a host of prosy words, flat ideas, complacent emotions. Her illusions of romance—blind and deaf on the previous night because of their great need for survival—staggered afterwards in the atmosphere of practical bedrooms and boresomely talkative, hampered men without a trace of the grave, dreamy child which she had assigned to them.

Instead of feeling a sense of shame, or loss, after these experiences, she regarded them as secondary mistakes, mildly compensating for a few hours, and unable to rob her because they had deprived her of nothing

save her confidence in her own desires. While she did not consider her body to be an unexclusive gift tendered to many men without debate, she did look upon it as the servant of her desires, a servant much less important than the struggle of these desires for happiness, once-rewarded sadness. In her idea of romance, people neither hoarded their bodies nor flung them indiscriminately, but contributed them willingly to any promise of happiness which seemed to rise head and shoulders above the dead level of life. If the promise turned out to be a lie, she denied wordlessly that her body had been lowered to itself, or that she had suffered anything except the confusion of ordinary pleasure with more persistent and complete unfolding. Her head was raised so high above the sense of frustration which lurks in all human beings that it refused to be jerked down by any contact with another person, unless this contact had been strong enough to reach the bottom of her heart.

Her body had become toughened to the routine of the hotel and she was able to leave at night with a moderate amount of springiness in her back and arms. During her spare time, she often stayed in her room and devoured books—some of the tales of warfare and love in little, mythical, European kingdoms, which were flooding the market at that time, since the craze for court-reporters' realism had not yet started in American fiction. Again she chatted with Ruth, in her room, and laughingly chided the latter girl's rhapsodies over her latest beau—the beaux changed on an average of twice a month, with repentance arriving on Sundays.

Again, she went to the Saturday night dances at the Masonic Hall, with some good-looking traveling-man picked up at the hotel, and tried to feel giddily elevated and courted on the polished floor, and repulsed him afterwards when his arms became persistent and he swore that she had smashed every particle of his heart. At the outset of their overtures, she was never indignant, or demurely expostulating, but she treated them with a calmness between sharpness and response, which held them at bay much more effectively. Hal' and Billy had recited poetry to her: and assailed people who thought only of money: and railed against sycophants—clever enough to scent an idealistic girl and advance her probable thirsts and convictions—but these other men were only tangy bulks to her, chosen because their faces were agreeable for a night of two-stepping forgetfulness.

Then winter slid into the chimings and burstings of spring, and Emmy Lou met Elmer Riesing, and another spring sprouted and shouted in her heart. . . . Elmer appeared at the hotel one evening with a shabby, fake-leather valise: a flaming red tie in his gray flannel shirt: and a checkered, gray and white cap pulled down over his bronzed, dirty face. Emmy Lou had gone downstairs to receive her weekly pay—the sacred ten-dollar bill in a brown manila envelope—and was tucking it into her imitation-alligator satchel when Elmer walked up to the desk. The night-clerk, Floyd Crane, was busy in the anteroom behind the desk-enclosure—where the hotel safe stood—and as Elmer stood and waited, Emmy Lou glanced at him and then found that

she could not turn her eyes away. His spotty, unpressed trousers and cracked shoes, together with the remainder of his clothes and the half-washed grime on his face, told her that he intended to apply for a job instead of a room, and yet he carried himself with such a chin-lifted, unconcerned, level-eyed deviltry that she could not be sure. She had noticed tramps applying at the hotel for jobs before, but all of them —even the young ones—had slouched in apathetically, or with glazed, darting-eyed faces and an itching twist to their bodies. This boy—he couldn't be more than twenty—stood erectly, with his weight on one foot, and puffed at his Duke's Mixture cigarette with all the assurance of a celebrated actor smoking in his dressing-room before the first curtain-call. The thought shot through her head in the guise of: "My, he holds himself just like the hero on the stage—doesn't care how much his clothes call him a liar!"

He had the face of a buccaneer trying to figure out where he had mislaid his cutlass and then deciding to murder the opponent with laughter—a lean face with a long broad nose, and wide lips, and the stubble of a black beard. When he turned and looked at Emmy Lou for a moment, his black eyes were insolent but void of sexual appraisal. She felt a pain in her heart, and tried to deride it, and failed. He reminded her of the afternoon when she had walked into this same lobby—bedraggled, soaked, uncertain—and acted out her impression of an affluent, polished lady weary of being waited on. Her shoulders had been racked by the pull of lifting heavy valises during a ten-block

walk and yet she had forced herself to hold them up as though they were cotton-fluffs. Fears and questions had crowded in her heart with bated breath, but she had held them back with a drawling, droopy-eyed, hoity-toity pose that literally shook her with sad mirth now, as she realized how ludicrous it must have been to everybody. Perhaps this boy was also playing a part and proudly denying his empty stomach and the scarey pain in his heart. Perhaps he was so tired that he could have sunk to the tile floor and slept there in an instant. Perhaps he was thrice-ashamed of his dirty suit and the crow's-nest of black hair at the back of his neck, and yet determined to stand straight, ward off the possible laughter at his appearance. Certainly, the contrast between his clothes and manner was no greater than hers had been on that foolish, upset, and now weirdly well-meaning afternoon of the heart. Course, she had been clean and well groomed, but that was no credit to her—simply the difference between a train-seat and a box-car floor.

Emmy Lou was a sentimentalist continually disparaging this quality and then arranging innumerable truces between sentimentality and skepticism, and then waking up afterwards to realize that the former had insinuated itself back to the old position and was muttering: "Well, here I am. . . . What are you going to do about it . . . cut-throat!" She told herself that this boy in front of the desk now was only an ordinary roustabout accustomed to such situations and astute enough to bluff his way through them—a figure without a grain of the strained pride and hidden confusion

which she had assigned it—but as usual her heart dispersed the words in her mind. Someone else might have been standing aside and scoffing at her too, on that first, willy-nilly afternoon. Not that they couldn't still scoff—she was only a chambermaid scooping the dirt out of other people's rooms and refusing to touch the more dangerous dirt in their hearts and minds—but she had become more self-reliant, wiser concerning the habits and motives of human beings, and, oh . . . much more certain of what she wanted. Yes, just a chambermaid waiting for a prince who probably didn't exist, and vain enough to want him to sing: "E-every morn I bring thee vi-iolets" to a girl who had no accomplishments that could make the world sit up and take notice. . . . Oh, stop pitying yourself, Emmy—wrap yourself up snugly . . . and go back to dreaming . . . and be patient.

Crane, an elderly man with a chubby, pinkly washed-out face beneath his gray-black hair, approached the desk. One glance told him the mission and status of this tall, slender boy, and his voice became negligent.

"Well, what d'yo-ou want?"

"I'm looking for a job. I'll take a-anything but I'd rather be a bell-hop."

"Yup, that's what you all say—figure all you'll have to do is run up and down without using your elbow-grease."

Elmer grinned without nastiness.

"Is that why you're clerking here, Mister?"

Crane became angry.

"Say, don't get sassy with me or you'll be bounced out of here on your noodle!"

"No-o, you do-on't say so. What's the matter, Mister—can't you be friendly? You joshed *me* about elbow-grease and I joshed right back at you—what's the harm in that?"

Crane was nonplussed and felt reluctantly small, and for the moment his irritation could not muster enough strength to rule his words.

"We-ell, never mind that. Let's get down to brass tacks. Have you had any experience working in hotels?"

"Nope, I haven't but—"

"I see. I'm afraid we can't use you then."

Crane snatched at a plausible excuse to exonerate his instinctive dislike for the boy in front of him.

"Why can't you? I'll be a hard-working slave and I'll promise not to talk back to you except on Sundays and holidays—I'm always li-ivelier then"—Elmer grinned again without a mote of conscious impertinence.

To him, this touchy old man was only disowning a sense of humor which could be eventually extracted by harmless jollying. And if by any chance the old man wasn't such a person . . . well, "he did need work to keep himself from starvation, or arrest, but he certainly wasn't going to prostrate himself for it!" To Crane, this flippancy from an unwashed nobody was astounding and obnoxious.

"Hard-working sla-ave. . . . I like that! We're not slave-drivers here, my boy!"

"Oh, tha-at's not what I meant."

"No?"

"No, that's not it. Everybody's a slave unless they're working for themselves, but I'll hustle around just the same, Mister. I've tried to live without working for two weeks now and I'm getting tired of it. It's kinda rough on my stomach."

By this time Crane could see nothing but an impudent, young enigma in front of him—an enigma too trifling to be unraveled.

"Yes, I see. . . . You're like all the lazy ones—work only when your belly's falling in. I'm sorry, but I guess we can't use you."

"Oh, all right. You'll lose an A number one bell-hop then, but it's your own fault. I tried my darndest, Mister, but you just wouldn't jump off your high mare and take a laugh with me."

"Is that so? Well, I'd advise *you* to get down to serious tacks, young man. You can't slide into a place with a snicker on your face and expect to find anything!"

As she stood and jabbed hatpins into the black velour platter on her head—to take away an attitude of out-an-out listening—Emmy Lou was captivated by Elmer's independence, so smilingly and airily at ease, in her opinion. Oh, yes, his words were "o-odd" to Crane and other people, who couldn't imagine why a raggedy boy asking for a job shouldn't behave meekly and se-eriously, but she understood him perfectly. It was precisely the way in which she would have talked on her first afternoon, if she had been a boy and dirtily

dressed, without a cent in her pocket and with no reason to believe that she could fool people into leaving her alone. He was inexperienced and hungry, and probably quaking inside of him, and yet even now he had enough gumption left to stick to his gay pose and keep from begging Crane to overlook his past words. . . . Sure Injun, he might be a mile away from her dreams in every other respect. She was a cold, hard one now and *not* the young lady who had been blind to Hal Crowninshield's flabbiness because he knew the loveliest parts of Tennyson by heart. But this boy here was penniless, thank God. He couldn't wake up in the morning and start to count his precious money, to see if anything had been stolen, and then ask her if she couldn't use five dollars to buy a new dress, and swear for five minutes because his silk shirt had been crumpled under the dresser. . . . Brr, me-en. . . . Never mind, all of them couldn't be the same, and she *liked* what this boy had said, and his joking, poking manner! She decided to intercede for him, wheedle Crane into employing him, if she could.

"Oh, Flo-oyd, de-ear . . . listen . . . I know it isn't my business but . . . why don't you give this boy a chance?'

A pause.

"He was only joking with you and trying to keep his spirits up, that's all. Why, I'll bet he hasn't had a meal for ages!"

Crane was a widower, soured by life on the top, mentally retarded, emotionally squashed, but Emmy Lou invariably slid through the chink in his armor of

defeat. He was fond of her because she spoke to all of his polluted memories—the times when he had sizzled and sparkled with hope and planned to study law and become President of the United States. The memories were almost extinct now but the shapeless huddle of them in his head admired her and the fact that she was more independent, ambitious than the other employees. Frequently, she told him of her plans to go on the stage some day, or called him an old crosspatch when he was in a vexed mood, or asked him to loan a book to her from his scanty library—"catch those others reading anything except the *Kal' Courier* and *The Police Gazette!*" In a man, this snappy tongue and bold aspiration would have become a disagreeable reminder to Crane—a windy, young competitor of his sex hoping to succeed where *he* and men ten times better had failed! In Emmy Lou, it was piquantly diverting to him—a cocky girl able to rise above the traditional weakness and simpering of her sex and think of something besides trousers, doilies, trousseaux, bless her unusual heart!

He smiled and shook a finger at her.

"Now, now . . . you know I'm not usually hard on these boys, Em'ly. I just want them to keep a civil tongue in their heads when they're talking to an older man."

Emmy Lou continued her blandishments and Crane began to stutter like a reprehensible neophyte overwhelmed by a saint, since his piques could not resist her pleas for compassion and remain justified to themselves. He gave Elmer the job vacated by a bellboy

on the afternoon of this day, and Elmer glowered at Emmy Lou—hating her pity and the fact that he had allowed a girl to intercede for him and had not interrupted with some gruff remark such as: "Say, you two, I don't need a girl to take up for me. I'm no sissy, and you can stick your job up the nearest flue, for all I care!" . . .

O puppets of human motives, pulled through a maze of songless resentments, squawking attempts at lyricism—he who interprets you can only reach for his own wires, cut his own heart, emerge from darkness with blood on his own hands. . . .

Elmer departed from the hotel and Emmy Lou waited a minute after his disappearance before she strolled out—she didn't want to give Crane and the lobbyites the impression that "she was mad about" Elmer and had only spoken to attract his response. Not that she really cared what *they* thought, but she had lived long enough to learn that a girl could only protect her larger actions and affairs by disguising the smaller ones. Otherwise, most people released a torrent of gossip, or bothered her with tons of advice, or tried to crush her underneath a silent disapproval, or sought to intervene and "save her" for something or other—the passion for meddling, which she had never been able to figure out because it was so alien to herself.

Elmer was already two blocks down the street and she had to race to catch up with him. When she touched his arm he was surprised, and then he stopped and looked at her with a stary, boy-shamming pensive-

ness tugged in her direction more than he had any idea of admitting to himself. In another girl, he would have spied a frantic pursuit for physical reasons and he would have accepted it, with a wry face, as the sole means of securing an impossible five:—haircut, shave, food, shoes, and a room for the week. In Emmy Lou's case he discerned an uncommon girl really drawn a bit toward the character he had shown, and he felt elated, raised above his shabby situation. He was far over twenty—his age—in his judgment of women and experience with them, though remarkably ignorant in other matters. He spoke first.

"Oh, hello."

"Hello."

"What's your name?"

"Emmy L— Emily Pearson."

"Mine's Elmer Riesing."

"Raysing?"

"Nope, Riesing."

"Oh, I see . . . where you going?"

"O-oh . . . nowheres."

"Have you got any money?"

"Sure, I'm waiting for the bank to open. Maybe you can cash me a check for fifty . . . what do you say?"

"*Have* you?"

"Nope, I'm flatter than Sally's pancake."

"Well, I'm going to give you some. I haven't *much,* but it'll be enough for your shoes, and your haircut and sha-ave. They won't let you start work to-morrow if you aren't slicked up. . . . And you'll have to eat something to . . . I know you must be hungry."

"You'll do nothing of the kind. I'm going down to the Salvation Army dump—they'll fix me up there."

"Oh, yes . . . they'll ask you a lot of questions and rub in their cha-arity, and then they'll come snooping around the hotel and get reports on you."

"How do you know?"

"I know a boy who went there—he's working in our kitchen now."

"Well, it's better than taking money from a girl."

"Don't be a si-illy—you can pay me back when you get your first week's wages, if you want to. . . . There aren't any vacancies in the house where I'm staying but I know another place just a couple of doors away. I'll tell the landlady you're going to work at the hotel and then she'll trust you for the first week's rent."

A short silence.

"Say, listen—"

"Oh, bother—you've *got* to have a place to sleep in."

"Say, why do you want to do all these things for me? You don't know me from A-adam!"

"I think I like you. . . . Isn't that enough?"

"You thi-ink so. That's a heck of a compliment!"

"It is to me. I don't even thi-ink I like most people."

Steel clanged against steel and marveled at the equal strength and, in the marveling, softened.

"Well, I liked *you* the minute I heard you talking to Old Crabby behind the desk. You ride high and so do I, but we know how to come down to earth when we've got to."

"Well, maybe I don't just think I like you . . . Elmer."

A pause.

"What kind of work d'you do?"

"I'm a chambermaid at the hotel . . . mop-slinger, that's all."

"That must be a pretty tough job!"

"Oh, I've done it so long I'm used to it now. . . . You come along, Elmer. I want to catch Mrs. Jetty —that's the landlady—before she goes out to-night." . . .

When they parted from each other that night their friendship was already mountainous, though each one denied the fact to himself. Realism could not be so quickly surmounted. Skin-sores resisted the nostrums of belief and need. Juvenile hearts with an under-surge of age—partly enforced, partly innate—refused to admit that the siren of happiness was anything but a midwife, preparing for the next abortion of pain. An unreal, wiseacre futility of youth here, already lambasted too much by sightless elders, held out against the slide of stronger emotions.

Emmy Lou's reactions could have been paraphrased in the following words: "Oh, he'll turn out to be another Be-erlanger—aren't all men alike? . . . Some aren't, but then they're spineless. Dickie was a weak one—I had to drag him into everything. . . . Hairy brutes and mammas' cuties. . . . Some in the middle too—dull and clingy, and careful. . . . Some would like to be brutes but they haven't the courage—puffed-up Bens and Ralphs doing cakewalk to keep

themselves and others from seeing how timid they are. . . . Stop slamming people—you're not so great yourself. . . . Just a chambermaid thinking she'll go on the stage some day—why-y, God knows—and if you ever do, your knees'll knock together. You're brave enough when it comes to fighting for what you want from one person, but you don't really care to dazzle mobs of people and make them applaud you. . . . Just aching to creep into a corner, and be alone, and imagine you're in a palace of your own with all the witches killed. . . . And you want to believe you'll find a man like yourself and he'll creep off with you . . . and you'll never wake up and discover the corner's not a palace but just 'n old dustbin. . . . Oh, yes . . . and both of you won't stay together forever—you'll shake hands and part with the bravest of smiles some day, and walk off to hunt for other corners, other make-believe palaces, other foolish dreams, but . . . yes . . . less foolish than what they're escaping from. A hundred times less! . . . Rave on, Emmy. . . . You'll be lonely, oh, for months at a time, and then you'll snatch at some cleverly talky man—thinking he *is* a fluffy child and a toughy man rolled into one—and he'll turn out to be all coarse and heavy and grownup next morning, next week. . . . You hate the real world, and some other people hate it too—for a few hours—but then the daylight pokes them in the ribs again and they're all business, all schemy, and stringy, and old. . . . You like this boy, Elmer, now, 'cause he seems to be a stubborn, lonely, punished child pretending he's a snarly man to keep

people from stepping on him. You like him 'cause you think he speaks out his mind without worrying half the time about how the other person's going to take it. You like him 'cause you think he can smile when he's hurt and cry when he's happy. You like him 'cause you believe he can be sad and happy together —so close that no one could tell them apart!—instead of being all smirking and guzzly 'cause he managed to reach his favorite jar of preserves on the shelf. Oh yes, you like him 'cause you *hope* he's got all the things you want most, all the things you've never found, except . . . a little . . . in Dickie lad . . . but, pouf!—to-morrow's liable to blow it all away! To-morrow, the day after . . . week after. . . . 'Maybe yes and maybe no. I'll never find out if I'm too slow.' Mistakes are much better than nothing, if they're strong and jingle-tingly enough and if they don't sneakingly know all the time that they *are* mistakes!"

Elmer's reactions, as he tossed and scratched on the bed of his vapidly brown-white room, were condensed in the following words: "Hell's bells, am I falling for another mamie? A mule's kick wouldn't drive any sense into me. . . . Say, what did I ever get from girls since I started out three years ago? Wallops and wriggles, whimpers and giggles. . . . Look what happened with Frances, first one I ever thought I loved. Snuggling up to me: and always talking about how she'd sing and I'd scrape the fiddle and some day we'd take the whole world by storm: and, oh yes . . . letting me kiss her till my heart

nearly popped out: and swearing she'd run away with me . . . and *then* . . . giving me the go-by the moment that family-pet walked in. . . . Old side-burns with the store on Fourth Street. . . . Oh yes, he could support her in great style, and he was a grand catch and his folks were high up in Milwaukee, and she could flash her stones in everybody's face. . . . Run along, school-boy, and wait till your pocket-book's full! . . . Making every excuse to put me off, and then telling me she'd discovered we weren't dee-eply meant for each other but we ought to be glad we'd had such a be-eautiful friendship. How they adore that word beautiful, when they want to skip off to a silk bedspread and keep their feet warm. . . . I'll never forget that evening . . . went home and smashed my fiddle . . . the old boy came in and licked me because he thought I was lazy and didn't care to practice—thought I had only been pretending to love the fiddle because I wanted to get out of working in his store. . . . 'Otherwise, why did you break it up, you young rascal?' . . . Of course, I couldn't tell him why—he wouldn't have understood and it would only have made him all the angrier. . . . Old people don't understand you because they don't stay young themselves—get caught up in a kind of machine, lose all of their dares, all of their fight-and-die dreams, and expect you to be just the same. Oh sure, they'll prate a yard about still being young, and tell you they want to be sympathetic chums with you and put an arm around your shoulders—just a-aching to join your sports and be agreeable to your friends

. . . but . . . the minute you want to stick to something big that's against their ideas, they go howling on the warpath and they're blind as a bat. . . . 'The-eir gre-eate-er expe-erience, and you've got to follow it' —it never seems to bring them much except—ma-aybe —a wad of dough. . . . Where was I now? Oh, yes, Frances—the devil with her. Aaa, just three kinds of girls, if you put it up to me. First kind pretend they're dreamy and romantic till you scratch them wrong. Second kind are just boy-crazy—decent flirts or easy hussies. Third kind are dull as shoe-leather —just anxious to marry any man they can stand, and have babies, and snooze their heads off. Don't tell me—I *know,* even if I am only twenty. Well, how does Emily Pearson fit into this? She *doesn't,* if she's the girl I think she is. But you said there were only three kinds. Yes, *almost* all of them—if a fellow couldn't believe in, oh, the possibility of one exception here and there, he'd feel like lying down and dying. . . . Oh, stop mooning about girls all the time and fight with life, try to make something out of yourself. But, darn it, each one was utterly lost without the other. Without the right kind of understanding girl, a boy didn't feel like slaving and scrapping—an extra shove just wasn't there. On the other hand, if he had her and wasn't buckling down to work, jogging his mind, but just mushing all the time, then he felt like an apron-tied milksop. . . . Why are you falling for this Emily girl—'cause she's been kind to you? Nope!—that rubs me wrong . . . I *hate* to be helped by anybody, though she made it so simple, and short,

and, oh, taken-for-granted, I had to smile back—didn't snivel over me or think she was better. Well, what *is* the reason then? . . . Oh, she's so darn frank and . . . I don't know what you'd call it . . . proud-humble, I guess . . . willing to strain herself out doing chambermaid work and yet she holds her head so high it's up in the sky when she's not working . . . and she'll bring it right down to your head too, if she likes you. Otherwise, you're clean out of the frame to her—she just doesn't see you. Is that all? Oh, I don't know . . . she's a dreamer and yet she isn't afraid to face things—all the dopy, funny, swindly-raspy things you find out the longer you live. She admits some of them are rotten but she doesn't blubber about it—she tries to keep them from jumping all over her, and then she dreams about what she would like them to be. . . . Doesn't smile all the time, but when she *does,* it isn't winter any more! Doesn't frown too much either, but when she's frowning you can tell that something's going on in her head and she's not just peeved over nothing. Of course, she's slim and blonde . . . my weakness . . . but that alone wouldn't turn me inside out. Oh, wouldn't it? . . . When you're 'specially gone on a girl's face and figure, don't you always try to imagine that she's beautiful in her heart and mind too? Yes, I have tried to believe it, but I always knew that I was *trying,* even with Frances. One part of me said yes so loud that I couldn't usually hear the other part saying no, but it was there. I never felt like I did when I was sitting with Emily on the stoop in front of her house

to-night and talking to her. I never felt every inch of me yelling yes about a girl I hadn't known for more than three hours. . . . Lovely picture you're drawing —hope you don't tear it up too soon. That remains to be seen! I'll save up and buy another fiddle and start playing again. I'm damn glad I ran away from home—selling shoes in the old boy's store and listening to his steam-blast. . . . I don't know which was worse. If it hadn't been for mother, I'd have blown out long ago. . . . Poor, weepy, wishwashy mother—she shakes all over whenever the old boy raises his voice. She tried to understand me a little anyway, but she couldn't get it into her head why I hated to work in that dusty, crusty, boxy store, trying shoes on smelly feet and listening to the customers bark all day. Well, she can't be any more unhappy now than she was listening to me fighting with dad all the time. . . . God, I hope Emily turns out to be what she seems to be. . . . God, it puts new marrow right in my bones." . . .

During the next few days, they slipped teasy remarks to each other in the third-floor hallway of the hotel, where he responded to guest-calls, and they conversed endlessly every night on the outside stoop of her rooming-house. The fact that they were both runaways from home made them cling together as mutually strengthened outcasts no longer outcasts except to the eyes of a rapidly disappearing world. Their first emotions toward each other were amplified to such a degree that the unnatural, naïvely mottled germ of cynicism within the externals of their spirits could not withstand the cleansing momentum. They had

been prematurely starved—sentimental idealists and clearly selfish recalcitrants, too weaponless, too materially clutched, to strike back at the world's pretense of the former and hatred of the latter. The joining of their hopes and bodies now gave them that commonly shared sword and shield which has survived through centuries of devious heart-murderers on one side and rationalists on the other—the dream that flesh can be more than flesh: that it can find within itself a soul able to rise above dirts, jealousies, and satiations, if only for a brief space: a soul able to cross back and forth between physical thoroughness and intangible removal without being "lowered" by the alleged inconsistency!

The differences between Emmy Lou and Elmer—differences that were eventually to separate this boy and girl—were those of surface temperament. Elmer's surliness at his own unimportance and the drudgeries to which he was doomed—despite his effervescent visions of fame as a "fiddle-scraper"—were to cause him to become physically unfaithful to her in the end and make her walk away, pride-stung but uncomplaining and sustaining herself with the memory of their past days. Rancor and self-hatred were impossible to her nature, and instead of being insanely promiscuous—in the generally accepted definition of these words—she was on the contrary an occasionally careless experimenter with a glorified, half sensual dream, which nestled against her for periods and then flew away just as she was beginning to revel in its permanent reality.

However, neither Emmy Lou nor Elmer had any inkling of these dark matters and endings during the first months of their love—their hunger was too inexhaustible to itself: their fancies were too delicately indulgent toward each other, literally flung into each other's arms by the need of protection from a practical, hairy-skinned world of brooms, ice-water, and kitchen-colloquialisms, and the quarrels created by the lunge of his frustrated moodiness against her oafish refusals to be impressed were quickly mended by a tangle of weepings and smiles. At first they tiptoed up the stairs to each other's rooms late at night—scarcely daring to raise their voices in the flimsy havens and oppressed by the ever-present fear of detection, of squawking landladies and leering roomers. Then, after a month of these delirious and yet dampened trysts, Elmer rebelled against the curtailed, stage-whispering hours and the fact that, in his opinion, he was acting like a craven criminal without sharing the feelings of one.

He urged her to marry him and they fought it out one night on the inevitable rooming-house stoop.

"Why won't you marry me, Em'? . . . Don't you ever feel . . . oh . . . feel we're doing wrong because we're not married?"

"I certainly don't. As long's I'm happy, and I'm not harming anybody else, I can always look a-anybody square in the eyes. Only part I hate is all this sneaking and whisp'ring all the time."

"That's just what I can't stand. You know perfectly well we can't go on like this forever—we've got to do something about it."

"That's true enough, but I'll never marry any man unless I've loved him for ye-ears."

A pause.

"Look here, Em', I don't like the way that sounds. D'you think you're going to stop loving me?"

"I don't right now, dear, and I'm pretty sure I won't for a long, long time . . . but just the same, it's li-iable to happen to both of us *some* day."

"Well, suppose it does and we a-are married?"

"That's just it—we'd have to worry about getting a divorce then and we wouldn't be nearly so free to pack up and scoot."

A pause.

"Why do most people marry anyway? It's just 'cause they're afraid people wouldn't have anything to do with them, if they didn't. And then again . . . one of them's afraid the other one's going to stop loving before *he* does . . . and he just wants the other to be tied down when it happens."

"Oh, I don't disagree with you the-ere, but those aren't the only reasons *I* can see. Suppose they're *not* married and then they go and have a baby. They wouldn't want their own child to be called. . . ."

"Oh, go ahead . . . be called a bastard. I know. People are never ha-appy unless they're throwing names at somebody 'r something. . . . I'd bring up *my* child not to be ashamed of what people said, and I'd show him just how do-ouble-faced most of them are."

The fierceness of her sentiments counteracted by the gentleness of her voice, threw a potent hush upon

his discontent. Her independence tallied with his and yet he was galled by their present situation and visualized marriage as the only escape from the present slinking limitations.

"Trouble is, Em', I don't really think different from you but I want to marry you because I can't bear things the way they are. I can't be happy if I've got to worry all the time about some old la-andlady knocking on the door and yelling our he-eads off. . . . I don't see any way out except marrying. If we went to another burg we'd run up against the same thing in a nutshell, unless we had money enough to rent a whole flat and . . . and we *said* we were husband and wife."

"Well, why can't we say it here? Lordie knows I hate lying worse than calomel, but there's times when a person's got to lie, Elm'."

"Yes, but how could we fool them right here in Kalamazoo? How? . . . That's a puzzler to me."

"Oh, we could get a day off at the hotel—give them so-ome kind of an excuse—and then take the train to Detroit and stay there overnight."

"Well, I still don't get it, Em'!"

"Don't you see?—then we can come back and say we were married there. It's easy as pie. . . . Chances are ten to one nobody'll ask to see our license, and even if they do, we can pretend to be insulted at the very ide-ea."

He lowered his head and felt mortified, robbed of the manly ability to do as he pleased and tell people

"to go chase themselves around the block," if they didn't like it!

"It's darn funny to me, Em'—you're so willing to back down and go to all this trouble, and yet you won't back down an inch about really marrying me!"

She looked at him with a motherly pain on her face, as she turned his words over in her mind, and then she smiled—a sad, inflexible smile.

"I guess you're right, Elm' . . . but I can't change myself. I'll tell a hundred fibs just to keep people from making me do what *they* want me to do. I don't think it's a bit wrong either. You see, if I didn't tell sma-all lies then I'd have to give in to lies a thousand times bigger, and I simply won't do that. It's not in my blood."

Her last words brightened him: gave him for the first time the feeling of a loving fellow-conspirator on the verge of deceiving the world, with her, to prevent it from forcing both of them to obey its stupid, dangerously bristling wishes.

"You win, Em'. . . . You always do . . . I guess you're the strongest one when it comes to thinking things out. . . . Anyway, I always wind up by agreeing with you, you old stubborn-face."

They kissed each other and the effects of the preceding wrangle were instantly cancelled. . . . The plan worked smoothly, and on the following Sunday they were installed in the drab-gilded, near-fusty parlor of her rooming-house, as Mr. and Mrs. Riesing. The deception weighed lightly on Emmy Lou. The child within the unmarred cubbyholes of her heart felt

that she was justified because grownups lived in a land of their own and made stringent, secretly dreaded laws for themselves, while children—caught within this realm against their will—were forced to tell disguising lies to keep the older people from endlessly knocking them down. Elmer, however, began to clinch with an imperceptibly mounting gloom and upbraided himself for the loss of his self-respect. He tried to shake it off, return to the feeling of an imperative, near-jaunty cabal, which had swayed him on the front stoop that night, but the effort failed because his surface skin was more sensitive than that of Emmy Lou. He shared her defiances, in a state of helpless agreement, but instead of heating and lighting his heart, they made it sag as though it held a bag of stones which it could not dislodge because it was essentially powerless to refute them. The jealous taunts of Berlanger and other men at the hotel slashed into his spirit—taunts such as: "You're a fat one—marrying a girl and you can't even support yourself! . . . Say, Elmer, your wi-ife's upstairs making beds—why don't you run up and help her? . . . Hot diggedy, when *I* marry a petticoat she won't be taking orders from nobody but *me*."

These remarks lashed and riddled him because he felt that he lacked even the status of a genuine target, and he dreaded the roar of laughter that would ensue if these men ever discovered that he was not married to Emmy Lou. Then she broke her ankle in a fall down a hotel-stairway and was forced to remain in their room for weeks, and Elmer brightened up—the

scrimping to keep himself and her alive on his meager wages, tips, gave him the controlling feeling which he had longed for. . . .

And now, more than a year after her escape from South Haven, Emmy Lou sat in the furnished parlor and waited for Elmer to return from the hotel. He slouched in at last, and flung his cap into a corner of the room, with a twitchy, whipped frown on his face. She opened her eyes, looked blankly around for a moment, and then gave him a quicksilvery smile.

" 'Lo, Elm' . . . dear. Gee, you're la-ate to-night."

"H'llo, Ems, ol' sweet"—he bent over to kiss her and then sat down on the lumpy, leather sofa near the window.

"Well, anyway, Ems, I won't have a chance to be late any other night."

"E-elm', what's the matter?"—she sat more straightly in her chair.

"Oh, Fred tied the can to me to-night—paid me up and told me to clear out for good, the dirty . . . slob."

"Why, Elm' . . . what happened?"

"He's been picking on me for the last week—I told you that before."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, early this morning he told me to get a broom and sweep up behind the desk. It's really the porter's job, but I said all right and I went ahead. Then he slid out to the elevator and stood there for a while . . . me sweeping, you know . . . and *then* he came running back and he swore he'd seen me pulling out the

cash-drawer and peeking inside! I called him a damn liar to his face and he flew up then and said he was going to can me to-night . . . the low-down weasel."

"Weasel would be too good for him, Elms. . . . I'd go down to-morrow and hand him the tongue-lashing of his li-ife, only it wouldn't be worth the trouble."

"Sure it wouldn't. I'm glad I'm out of that two-by-four dump—nickel tips and orders, o-orders from everybody!"

After a short silence, she said: "Say, Elm', I've got an idea—let's go to Chicago to-morrow!"

"Chicago? On what? I haven't got more than three plunks to my name."

"Well, *I've* got twenty-five, Elm'—I saved it up before I met you and I've been hiding it under the carpet here!"

"Twenty-five simoleons . . . oh, boy! Why didn't you tell me about them?"

" 'Cause I was afraid we'd start to spend them if I did."

A pause.

"Listen, Elms, let's get out of this scraggly old town! There's never anything lively here—just a bunch of mean, gossipy, old sleepy-heads . . . I know darn well we can find better jobs in Chi'. . . . I know it!"

"Yes, but how about your ankle?"

"It's strong as ever now. I went out walking this afternoon and it didn't hurt me a bit."

After another brief silence, he answered: "Well, I'm

game if you are, Ems, only . . . I don't like the idea of going on *your* money."

"Oh, don't be so foo-oolish—if *we* belong to each other, dear, then our money does too . . . you bantam-rooster you. . . . Sometimes I think you're just a little too proud to li-ive."

She walked to the sofa and sat beside him, and pressed her head against his. He kissed her and the old, red cyclone revived his heart—now he would escape from the jeers of small-town men and speed to a huge city pounding and seething with ambitious possibilities, and find a less menial, well-paying job, and . . . marry this tender-sharp, still strange girl, who goaded and yet exhilarated him beyond endurance. He pressed her shoulders against the sofa, and the room disappeared to both of them. . . .

On the following morning they traveled to Chicago and found a cheap, rusty-dusty, light-housekeeping room on lower North Clark Street—still posing as man and wife. The room faltered between tame and hideous—with its pine folding-bed standing upright in a corner: peeled-off, maple bureau: soiled wallpaper of alleged rosebuds against a tan trellis-work—but Emmy Lou and Elmer felt too gayly uprooted, too filled with a sense of daredevilish isolation, to be depressed, or overconscious of their surroundings.

On the next morning, however, after Elmer had tramped out to search for work, Emmy Lou woke up to the proximity of her former home, and parents, and a lightly sad curiosity rose within her. How were they feeling now? Were they sad too, and much more gentle

in their hearts, hoping that she would come back some day and give them a chance to treat her more leniently? Would they refuse to speak to her, if she visited them now, except to tell her that she was a selfish monster unworthy of their love? Were they still angry at her and would they try to have her locked up and punished if she walked in to-day? Had they almost forgotten her, regarding her as a daughter too criminal, unaffectionate, to be remembered? Did they imagine that she was dead, and were they mourning her now with a frenzied repentance in their hearts? . . . The questions spiraled up from their shallowly buried graves within her and arranged themselves in a dance of specters—specters without accusing fingers pointed at her, but, nevertheless, shaking her breast a little, rousing it to a ghost of loving concern, dismay. The possibility of selfish culpability was no longer perceptible, and her rebellion had long since become an established verity paid for by the sweat of her body, and yet . . . a blood-call purred and rippled once more in her veins. They *were* her own parents, despite everything, and their cruelty had been more blind than intentional, and she could never become absolutely cold and completely dismiss them from her mind and heart! Why shouldn't she visit them now and see if their attitudes had changed, and try to explain to them why she could never live under their roof again, never bend down to them. They might be more willing to listen now, and even her mother might have become less preachy, and screechy, and whiny . . . and her father . . . poor, bitter-sweet, tormented father, whose

face she had been forced to strike—she simply had to see him again!

She sprang to her feet, threw on her hat and coat, and dashed out of the room. On the way to the South-Side apartment her heart became lighter, filled with buzzy, optimistic musings—perhaps they would be overjoyed to see her: perhaps their harshness had gone, never to return: perhaps they would be only too glad to have her visit them regularly, and advance a peace in which her childhood, unquestioning love for them might breathe again.

When she stood in the familiar hallway and rang the bell, however, the spurious lightness fled and a heavy uncertainty replaced it. What was going to happen now? . . . Oh, if she only kne-ew. . . .

Ethel opened the door and then stared at her daughter for several seconds, without speaking or moving—too thunderstruck to clarify her emotions.

"Mother, dear . . . I'm so-o glad to see you! I've come to have a talk with you"—Emmy Lou tried to make her voice bright but it shook toward the end, as she stepped forward to kiss her mother.

Ethel pushed her daughter away and stared at her again—this time with an infinite resentment in her eyes. Within her, a vortex arose and was blown back and forth by her desires to fondle and slap whirled inextricably together. The past year had brought actual pain to her hitherto unpained heart and dragged her half-way back to humbleness, but her prejudices were still iron-rooted, still sightless, and they made a vain effort to shout against this daughter.

"So . . . you're back again . . . you finally remembered I was alive. . . . Oh, you bad, bad girl. . . . I ought to hate you. . . . I ought to slam this door in your face, but I can't. . . . I can't forget you're my daughter."

She wept and threw her arms around Emmy Lou, and as Emmy Lou returned the embrace, her own eyes were wet. Her mother's love was awake and despairing for the first time, and the impact of this awakening made Emmy Lou panicky, made her long-nurtured independence stagger back.

They walked inside and sat in the mawkishly cluttered parlor. Ethel had dropped into the red-plush armchair and was looking at her daughter with anger and tenderness welling in one light from her eyes and scarcely aware of the difference.

"Where's father—is he down at the store?"

Ethel began to weep again but she checked it and made a mighty effort to summon cold hatred to her face.

"Where is he, mother? . . . Why don't you answer me?"

"Your father is . . . dead."

"De-ead?"

"Yes, he died a month ago . . . another one of his heart-strokes. I rushed him to the hospital but he died there an hour later."

A pause.

"Oh, *you're* the cause of his death . . . you broke his poor heart and he couldn't bear to live any longer. You did it. . . . you selfish, se-elfi-ish gi-irl."

Emmy Lou's heart snapped and blackness revolved within it, with increasing speed, until it felt like a shapeless accusation spinning around in the effort to throw off its own tearing validity. The rotations attained an incalculable swiftness and then stopped, as suddenly as they had begun. An incredibly curative, scarcely earthly, incontrovertible peace closed the fissure in her heart and ascended to her lips.

"It isn't true. . . . I didn't kill him, mother . . . life killed him . . . something nobody can put his finger on . . . something outside of everybody and inside of them too . . . something they can't fight against 'cause it's what they are . . . what they've got to be!"

Ethel was uncomprehending, but her daughter's words soothed her against her will, silenced her heart with a formless, friendly towering meaning, which she could neither receive nor reject because it would not speak more clearly.

Emmy Lou went on, rapidly: "Father was always trying to hurt himself . . . trying to hurt me too . . . but he couldn't help it . . . he just loved and hated him and me until he didn't know what he was doing. . . . I'm not going to be like he was, mother . . . I'm going to stay beautiful to me-e . . . always . . . and everybody else can think I'm staying ugly. . . . I don't care . . . only I'm not going to hide myself like he did. . . . I'm going to love my Elmer . . . and love other men too . . . and I'll be happy and sad so many times . . . I know . . . but I'll never be ashamed of myself 'cause I'll never do anything I

didn't want to do. . . . Father always did things he didn't want to do 'cause he was afraid to go against them . . . and then he ma-ade himself think they were right so's he wouldn't be too unhappy about them . . . but I'm not going to be like that, mother. . . . I'm going to stay beautiful to myself and stay ugly to other people . . . always."

Still uncomprehending, but swept out of her smallness by the guiltless, rhapsodical, softly relentless conviction within Emmy Lou's voice, Ethel rose to her feet, walked over to her daughter, and fell to her knees as she buried her head against Emmy Lou's bosom.

THE END

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